DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 397 545 EA 027 941

AUTHOR	Rutherford, Barry; And Others
TITLE	Parent and Community Involvement in Education. Volume II: Case Studies. Studies of Education Reform.
INSTITUTION	RMC Research Corp., Denver, CO.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	95
CONTRACT	RR91172008
NOTE	139p.; For Volumes I-III of this particular study, see EA 027 940-942. For documents related to this study, see ED 368 511-512. For all 12 final reports (36 volumes) in this series of studies, see EA 027 926-961.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Case Studies; *Educational Change; *Family School Relationship; Intermediate Grades; Middle Schools; *Parent Participation; *Parent School Relationship; Partnerships in Education; Program Effectiveness; *School Community Relationship; School Restructuring
IDENTIFIERS	*Studies of Education Reform (OERI)

ABSTRACT

Genuine educational reform depends on developing relationships with the home, community groups, politicians, and the business community (Seeley, 1981). This volume is the second of three reports that are products of a 3.5 year study of education reform, with a focus on the role of parent, family, and community involvement in the middle grades. The study focused on comprehensive districtwide parent and community involvement programs, school restructuring, and school-initiated adult-child learning programs. This volume presents the full text of each of the nine case studies, which resulted from site visits that were conducted during the 1993-94 school year. The case studies are organized around six topics--context, program (including planning, design, and implementation), challenges, supports, outcomes, and lessons. The case studies include three comprehensive districtwide parent and community involvement programs: Jefferson County Public Schools (Louisville, Kentucky); Minneapolis Public Schools (Minneapolis, Minnesota); and Fort Worth Independent School District (Fort Worth, Texas). The three school-restructuring programs included Lamoni Middle School (Lamoni, Iowa); Beck Middle School (Georgetown, South Carolina); and Shelburne Middle School (Shelburne, Vermont). The three adult/child learning activities (or home learning) programs were located in: Natchez-Adams School District (Natchez, Mississippi); Community School District Number 3 (New York, New York); and Rochester Public Schools (Rochester, New York.) (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 397 545

FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT
VOLUME II: CASE STUDIES

STUDIES OF EDUCATION REFORM: PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

Office of Educational Research and Improvement,
United States Department of Education
Contract Number RR91-1720.08

RMC Research Corporation
Writer Square
1512 Larimer Street, Suite 540
Denver, Colorado 80202

June 30, 1995

EA027941

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

STUDIES OF EDUCATION REFORM: PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT
VOLUME II

Case Studies

1995

By:

Barry Rutherford
Beckie Anderson
Rivian Bernick
Janet Brown
Shelley Billig
Michael Livesay
Pat Seppanen
Cari Swenson

RMC Research Corporation

This volume is one of three that are the culmination of a three and one-half year study of education reform, and specifically, the role of parent, family, and community involvement in the middle grades. The study addressed how school districts have provided opportunities for parents and families to be involved in education reform that benefits all children; how parents, families, and communities are involved in the restructuring of middle grade education; and school-initiatied activities that promote interaction between adults and students in their home settings. The study was carried out by RMC Research Corporation, under contract with the Office of Educational Research and Improvement in the U.S. Department of Education.

In this volume, we present the full text of each of the nine case studies. These case studies are narratives that present our finding from site visits conducted at these nine sites during the 1993-94 school year. The case studies are organized around six topics: Context, Program (including Planning, Design, and Implementation), Challenges, Supports, Outcomes, and Lessons.

Volume I summarizes the current state-of-the-art, results of visits to each of nine sites, and provide a cross-case narrative that analyzes our findings across all sites in terms of the issues that emerged from our site visits. Volume I concludes with sections on the impact of reform efforts on outcomes for schools, practitioners, parents, and students; an assessment of the resources needed to carry out reform efforts; and implications for policy, practice, and future research.

In a subsequent volume we provide our research design and methodology.

The conduct of this study and the preparation of this report were sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, under Contract No. RR91-1720.08 (Oliver Moles, Project Officer). Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education. Nor do the examples included herein imply judgment by the Department or the contractor regarding the quality or status of the program.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Preface i

Acknowledgements iii

CASE STUDIES

Comprehensive Districtwide Parent and Community Involvement Programs 1
  Jefferson County Public Schools
    Louisville, Kentucky 3
  Minneapolis Public Schools
    Minneapolis, Minnesota 33
  Forth Worth Independent School District
    Fort Worth, Texas 53
School Restructuring 73
  Lamoni Middle School
    Lamoni, Iowa 75
  Beck Middle School
    Georgetown, South Carolina 91
  Shelburne Middle School
    Shelburne, Vermont 107
Adult/Child Learning Activities (Home Learning) 121
  Natchez-Adams School District 123
    Natchez, Mississippi
  Community School District Number 3 143
    New York, New York
  Rochester Public Schools 157
    Rochester, New York

PREFACE

Overview. In April 1991 the United States Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) issued a Request for Proposals for twelve studies that focus on nationally significant recent education reform and restructuring efforts across the country. The fundamental purpose of each of these studies is to document and analyze promising and successful models and practices that others can learn from or emulate as they seek to reform American education. Based on existing data, the studies examine the impact of the reforms, particularly the impact on students, and especially the impact on student learning. What was expected of the reform? What has it accomplished?

In September 1991 RMC Research Corporation was awarded the contract to study parent and community involvement in education, emphasizing programs at the middle grades (grades 6-8), as one of the twelve studies of educational reform. Three aspects of parent and community involvement in education were the focus of this study: comprehensive districtwide efforts to involve parents, families, and community members in the education of all children; parent and community involvement in the restructuring of middle grade education; and the involvement of parents and families through interactive activities at home that support learning in school.

Scope of the work. This volume of the Final Technical Report represents the full text of each of the case studies that were written as a result of fieldwork completed during the 1993-94 school year. During the spring and summer of 1994, researchers conducted a total of 18 site visits (two visits to each of nine sites). Three sites were chosen for each of the three research focus areas. Comprehensive districtwide program sites included Ft. Worth, Texas; Louisville, Kentucky; and Minneapolis, Minnesota. Sites for the school restructuring focus area were Beck Middle School, Georgetown, South Carolina; Lamoni Middle School, Lamoni, Iowa; and Shelburne Middle School, Shelburne, Vermont. Adult-child learning experiences were studied in Community School District Number 3, New York City; the Natchez-Adams Parent Center, Natchez, Mississippi; and in Rochester Public Schools, Rochester, New York.

After the site visits, researchers analyzed and synthesized the data gathered during the visit into case study narratives. Each case study includes data on context; program planning, design, and implementation; challenges faced by each site; supports necessary to undertake the reforms; outcomes; and within-site analyses, presented as "lessons" that we learned from each site. Case study summaries were written and are included in Volume I: Findings and Conclusions of this Final Technical Report.

After all case studies were written, a cross-case narrative was prepared. The cross-case narrative details our analysis of findings across all nine sites, presented as eight issues of middle grade parent, family, and community involvement. Key approaches used by schools and school districts were discussed, and examples from the fieldwork were cited. (see Volume I: Findings and Conclusions).

Other key tasks for this contract, reported elsewhere, included: conducting a national conference (Rutherford, et al., 1992); a review of the current state-of-the-art and five commissioned papers (Rutherford, 1995); two initial practical products (Bernick, Rutherford and Elliott, 1993; Bernick and Rutherford, 1994), and a final practical product drawn from the cross-case narrative (RMC Research, 1995); and dissemination of information from the study (Rutherford, et al., 1993; Rutherford and Billig, 1995).

Conclusion. The reform of American education is a major undertaking. We have learned valuable lessons from the sites that we visited that are participating in reforming education in our nation. Each of the sites we visited have experienced success, to varying degrees. None, however, felt that the job of reform was finished. Time and again we heard that there was more to be learned, and that more time was needed to accomplish their goals. From the experiences of those involved in the process of reform reported here, it is our hope that others can learn and be successful.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank the local site coordinators in each of the nine sites for paving the way for our research teams. A special thanks to school district administrators, school principals, classroom teachers, volunteers, parents, and students who gave many hours of their time with the field teams discussing middle grade family and community involvement.

I especially want to acknowledge the work of my colleagues at RMC Research, especially Pat Seppanen, Michael Livesay, and Rivian Bernick . Each of them played a key role as leaders for the field research teams. Janet Brown and Cari Swenson served as field researchers on the site visit teams. Each of these colleagues contributed immeasurably to the success of the fieldwork effort, and helped to draft the initial data reduction guides and preliminary case studies.

I want to thank Beckie Anderson. Without her help in the final stages of writing and editing the case studies, we could not have completed this important task.

Without the support of the office staff we could not have done our job as well. Thanks to Ed Allen, Liz Goodman, and Mary Ann Strassner. Thanks, too, to Dagnija Langberg who - as a new staff member - pitched in to help with the last minute details.

A special thank you to the project's advisory group who helped with the initial conceptualization of the study, reviewed preliminary findings, and gave advice about our practical products. The five panel members were: Nancy Berla, formerly with the National Committee for Citizens in Education; Don Davies, past President of the Institute for Responsive Education, Boston University; Joyce Epstein, Johns Hopkins University, Co-Director (with Don Davies) of the Center on Families, Communities, Schools & Children's Learning, ; Warlene Gary, Project Manager, Center for the Revitalization of Urban Education, National Education Association; and Patrick Shields, SRI International.

Finally, I would also like to thank our OERI Contracting Officer's Technical Representative, Dr. Oliver Moles. His efforts helped the management of the study run smoothly, and his substantive comments on our work improved its quality.

Barry Rutherford
Project Director

Comprehensive Districtwide Parent and Community Involvement Programs

Jefferson County Public Schools
Louisville, Kentucky

Primary Authors:
Barry Rutherford
Rivian Bernick

Data Collection/Reduction:
Barry Rutherford
Rivian Bernick

Minneapolis Public Schools
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Primary Authors:
Rivian Bernick
Barry Rutherford

Data Collection/Reduction:
Rivian Bernick
Barry Rutherford

Fort Worth Independent School District
Fort Worth, Texas

Primary Authors:
Rivian Bernick
Cari Swenson
Barry Rutherford

Data Collection/Reduction:
Rivian Bernick
Cari Swenson

Jefferson County Public Schools
Louisville, Kentucky

Case Study

Historically, Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS), Louisville, Kentucky, has been committed to educational reform. JCPS, like so many large districts in the nation, struggles to understand change and implement policy mandates. It does not, however, question the wisdom of involving parents, families, and the community in the reform process. This is its most striking feature - a belief system at whose core is the recognition that parents, families, community members, and businesses can and do make a difference in education for the children of Louisville. We found in our interviews and observations that it was difficult for parents, practitioners, administrators, and community/business members to talk in terms of a parent, family, and community involvement "program." We finally came to understand that parents and families and the community are an integral part of school reform, and that JCPS finds unique ways to translate their beliefs about parent, family, and community involvement into action.

Context

Statewide Reform. In 1989 the Kentucky Supreme Court issued an opinion that stated that the "entire sweep"[1] of the educational system was unconstitutional. As a result, the state legislature, the General Assembly, created a Task Force on Education Reform. The final plan of the Task Force was adopted, and House Bill 940, the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), became law on July 13, 1990.

KERA is significant because it sets into place, through legislation, statewide education reform. The legislation was carefully written; it is not vague in its proposals for reform. Provisions are made for reform in three areas: curriculum, governance, and finance. The General Assembly provides a timeline for implementation of reform. It is in the area of curriculum reform that we find a direct link to parent, family, and community involvement through school-based decision making and Family Resource Centers/Youth Services Centers:

> By January, 1991, each local board must have a policy for school-based decision making; by the 1991-92 school year, each district must have at least one school with school-based decision making; each participating school must have a council composed of parents, teachers, and an administrator, to adopt policies relating to instructional materials, personnel, curriculum, extracurricular programs, and other aspects of school management.
>
> Plans will be developed for family resource centers and youth services centers to be started over the next five years in or near certain schools; the centers will provide services to students and families in areas where at least 20 percent of the students qualify for free school

meals. The family resource centers will be in or near elementary schools and youth services centers will be in or near schools serving students 12 or older.

Although the majority of our respondents expressed concerns about other aspects of KERA, for example the rewards and sanctions of the statewide assessment program or professional development to understand how to implement reform, none questioned the involvement of parents, families, and community members in reform efforts.

Funding for these reforms is provided through both state and local support. State support is established through the Support Education Excellence in Kentucky (SEEK) fund. The SEEK fund provides minimum per pupil expenditures in excess of $2,400 per year, and adjusts costs based on educating at-risk children identified by participation in the free lunch program, educating exceptional children, and district transportation costs. Grants for assisting in the establishment of Family Resource Centers and Youth Services Centers in eligible districts are provided. KERA mandates a minimum level of local support for education, and requires property to be assessed at 100 percent of its cash value.

Louisville/Jefferson County Public Schools. Louisville, a city of over half a million people, is located along the Ohio River on the north central border of the state. It is unique in that it retains a "laid back attitude of the South," as one respondent put it, and an economy that is traditionally identified with industrial manufacturing of northern states. Within a short drive, the urban center gives way to rolling hills and farmlands of more rural areas. Louisville is home to major corporations: Kentucky Fried Chicken, John Deere, and The Henry Vogt Machine Company. It is a major hub for United Parcel Service (UPS). Because of UPS, Louisville is the site of the busiest airport in the United States from 2 a.m. to 4 a.m. Perhaps it is best known for its impressive history in horse racing, hosting one of the jewels of the Triple Crown, the Kentucky Derby, at Churchill Downs.

The city is divided geographically into socioeconomic areas: the west end is a predominantly lower socioeconomic area; the southwestern area of the county is populated by semi-skilled and skilled laborers; the east end is the area with the highest per capita income in the county - the professional community; the central urban area is a mixture of all socioeconomic levels.

Several of our respondents have long histories in Jefferson County and with Jefferson County Public Schools. They trace the beginnings of active parent, family, and community involvement to the school desegregation order of 1975, and the leadership in the district from 1980-1992. In the 1950's there were two school districts: the City of Louisville and Jefferson County. The city system was old and established, with a nationally recognized high school. The systems were segregated, not only racially but also by gender. Between 1958 and 1968 the county grew very quickly. The court order mandated not only desegregation, but also a merger of the two school systems. As it did in many districts around the nation, court-ordered desegregation caused community unrest. As a result, the school district worked closely with parents, families, and community members to ensure safety for all children and a smooth transition to desegregation. Town hall meetings were held, and parents rode school buses. County and city officials, including fire and police officers, worked around the clock. The transition was completed within six weeks; Jefferson County Public Schools, a desegregated and merged system, was created.

From 1975 until 1980 there were two superintendents. As one informant put it, "those were difficult jobs during very difficult times." In 1980 a new superintendent was hired. "His vision," as one district administrator described, "was to foster a relationship that brought businesses into the schools." Other informants described his leadership as "visionary," "totally committed to the idea of parent and community involvement," and "a true force in coalescing the parents/families, community members and businesses to improve the education system." In 1992 a new superintendent was hired. The idea of parent, family, and community involvement was, by that time, so embedded within the operational structure of the district that both parents and community members served on the committee that would ultimately hire the current superintendent.

The Jefferson County Public School District is one of the 25 largest school districts in the United States. There are currently over 96,000 students in the district. Of these students, 69 percent are white; 31 percent are minority, mostly African American; 46 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals; and 29 percent live in single parent households. The total budget for the district is estimated at $470 million. Per pupil expenditure is estimated at $4,550 - an increase of $2,150 over the state mandated minimum of $2,400.

Students attend one of 87 elementary schools, 23 middle schools, 20 high schools (with 14 Magnet Career Academies), and 21 other learning centers. Student placement in schools is based, generally, on geographic attendance zones. These attendance zones ensure racial integration. Elementary schools are clustered in groups with five to seven schools in each cluster. Students may voluntarily exchange schools within the cluster, provided building capacity and racial guidelines are met. Students in both elementary and middle schools who are accepted into magnet programs are not subject to school attendance zones. High school students are assigned to high schools by attendance zones; however, JCPS has an Open Enrollment Policy that allows students to attend any high school of their choice, provided building capacity and racial guidelines are met. In most cases, JCPS provides transportation. The Middle School Liaison told us that JCPS runs approximately 800 buses per day and logs over 13 million miles in bus travel per year.

Beginning in the fall of 1994, JCPS administrative offices will be restructured to include a Director of Middle Schools (formerly the Middle School Liaison). The Director is responsible for overseeing the instructional and operational programs of the district's 23 middle schools, and as he said, "I work in everything that touches middle schools." A resource teacher is assigned to the Middle School office and helps with the administration of programs. In addition to the Director of Middle Schools, JCPS employs a Middle School Advocate. The Advocate positions - there is one for each level of schooling - are newly designed and the Middle School Advocate told us:

> My role is emerging and sometimes it's confusing, but I tell people that I serve as the communication link between the middle school principals and the Superintendent on a daily basis in terms of issues [where] they feel that they need a voice with the Superintendent. When I look at the big picture, when I look systemically at things, I'm the person to whom the Superintendent looks for help in reforming the middle schools in this district.

School/business partnerships are arranged through the Coordinator of Business Involvement. The Coordinator not only arranges partnerships between schools and business, but also helps middle schools to find other fiscal and human resources. She is actively involved in districtwide fundraising activities and helps to write grants to obtain additional funding for district program initiatives.

The commitment of the seven member Jefferson County Board of Education to a partnership with parents, families, and the community is directly addressed in Goal 3, adopted for the 1993-94 school year:

> The Jefferson County Public Schools will ensure that the school community receives information about the District's programs, progress and functions, and the implementation of the Kentucky Education Reform Act and that the community has opportunities to participate as a partner with the District.

Board policies support the goals of the Board of Education. These policies speak to parents, families, and community members as welcomed participants, as resources for the instructional program, and as decision makers. The most detailed policy for parent, family involvement is found surrounding the Chapter 1 program. Chapter 1 is the largest program of federal aid to education and requires state and local education agencies to develop policies to involve parents and families in the program.

It is interesting to note that these policies, with the exception of those pertaining to school-based decision making, were adopted prior to the passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act. Two were adopted in 1979.

All JCPS schools fall within seven instructional program areas: Comprehensive Program, Advance Program, Exceptional Child Education, Honors Program, Magnet Schools, Optional Programs and Traditional Programs. Each of these programs is designed to meet both general and specific needs of students. During our site visits, we scheduled time at three JCPS middle schools: Barret Traditional, Iroquois, and Thomas Jefferson.

Program emphases at Barret Traditional Middle are: basic education combined with a model technology program; homework; a dress code; and parent and family support and involvement. Iroquois Middle is one of three JCPS middle schools involved in the High ^{5} project (described in detail later in this case study). Iroquois also is a Health Promotion School of Excellence. Thomas Jefferson Middle is a magnet school for communication. There are two components of the program: a computerized Writing/Publishing Center and a four-studio Audio/Visual Center. Students rotate from one center to the other on alternating weeks.

In all three schools we found students, parents, and school personnel to be open and willing to talk about their schools and how they are involved. Buildings and grounds are well maintained and entrances are designed to be inviting and enjoyable. We were impressed with the technology available to students in each of the schools. Equipment is generally state-of-the art. Student work is prominently displayed in classrooms. Parent Centers or rooms for parents to use were equipped with reading materials, coffee pots, comfortable seating areas and instructional materials for parents/family members to use to help students at home.

Effects of statewide reform. We were concerned about how reform, especially reform initiated at the state level, had influenced district parent, family, and community involvement initiatives. What emerged from our interviews was a story of reform - and the roles that parents, families, and community members and business play in reform - that is constructed from the perspective of the participants. In other words, participants construct the meaning of reform as they participate in its implementation.

District level personnel are concerned with the big picture of reform. Effects center around formulas for equalization of state funds to school districts, implementing the statewide assessment system, and determining the scope of curricular and instructional reform. The district adopts policies, and plans and implements programs at the district level that are intended to include parents, families, community and businesses in school processes. The effects of statewide reform are more evident in curriculum and instruction, statewide assessment, and finance than they are in parent, family, and community involvement due to the degree to which parents and families and the community has been involved in districtwide efforts that create partnerships to reform education in Jefferson County.

School level administrators deal with the effects of the funding formula on individual school budgets; but, they more often speak of reform in terms of school-based programs and how to obtain funds to implement them. They feel the effects of the statewide assessment system in terms of the performance of their schools, and the public impressions that are formed when test scores are released. The building administrators that we talked with understand that curricular and instructional reforms impact their teachers; they expressed a desire for professional development to help teachers implement reform within the context and philosophy of middle grade education. Again, due to the degree of institutionalization of parent, family, and community involvement in schools, the building administrators indicated a strong level of comfort with the partnerships that had been created with parents and families and the community in their schools.

Teachers most often talked to us about professional development. They understand that current reforms directly impact how and what they teach in their classrooms. They often express concerns about how to make it happen and the need for training in new methods and assessment techniques. As one teacher put it, "This is a whole new way of thinking about teaching, and especially about testing kids. How do I make it work in my classroom? I want to do the best I can, but these changes make a lot of demands on us." Teachers also desire professional development on how to work with parents and families to improve student achievement. In our interviews, communication with parents and families, and new and unique ways of working with parents and families were mentioned as areas where more staff development was needed.

Parents seek to understand current education reform and the opportunities for change that reform creates. They believe that the school has the responsibility to inform them about changes in policies, school operating procedures, and curriculum and instruction. Most often, they spoke about how reform would affect their children, especially curriculum materials and testing. Parents expressed a desire to be involved, both as a support to their children and as a support for teachers and the school. One parent said, "I want my child to receive the best education, and I want to help. I do what I can in the time that I have. I think these changes [through KERA] are probably good, but I need to know more in order to see where I fit in."

Program

Planning, Design, and Implementation

We began our site visits with the idea that we would find a parent, family, and community involvement "program," planned and designed at the district level, and implemented throughout the middle schools in Jefferson County. What emerged was a very different picture. Planning and design occurs on four levels: state, district, school, and teacher. Although state policies support implementation, program efforts are actually implemented at the district, school, and teacher levels. It is important to recognize that at each of these levels parents, families, community members, and businesses are considered an integral part of the initiative." The involvement of parents, family members, community members and businesses is sometimes an outcome of the program; more often parents, families, community members and businesses are key players in the planning and design of reform efforts.

State-level planning and design. Through KERA, the state provides a policy framework for parents, families, and community members to be involved in decision making through site-based decision making councils. It is clear that the intent of the legislation is to ensure that parents and community members have a voice in the management of schools. The purpose of the councils is to adopt policies about instructional materials, student support services, personnel assignments, curriculum, and extracurricular programs. Decision making and adopting policies related to the management of schools may be unfamiliar territory for parent, family, and community participants. Full participation in decision and policy making, beyond being a token member of the council, requires training. "I enjoy being on the participatory management team," one parent said, "but sometimes I feel like I don't have a lot to contribute. I do understand a lot more now about how schools are run, and what a hard job it is."

KERA also provides for involvement through Family Resource Centers and Youth Services Centers. The Youth Services Centers are designed to serve the middle school population. Each site offers such services as referrals to health and social services, employment counseling, training and placement, job development, drug and alcohol abuse counseling, and family crisis and mental health counseling.

District-level planning, design, and implementation. There is no districtwide program for parent, family, and community involvement. What we found were programs designed for the middle schools with parent, family, and community involvement as an integral part of the design of the initiative. As the Middle School Liaison said to us, "if you go looking for a program, or for someone who is called the 'Director of Parent Involvement,' I don't think you'll find it."

We found that district-level initiatives fall into two distinct groups. The first group of initiatives directly involve parents, family members, and community members in school-based activities. The second group of initiatives involves partnerships between JCPS and local businesses, and will be discussed next.

The goal for all instructional programs provided at the middle grades is to improve student achievement. In order to reach that goal, families, community members, and business professionals participate in partnerships with the district and with district middle schools. The expectation from district level administrators and leadership is that parents play a critical role in supporting their children, and in helping to shape the educational experience of middle school students. To that end, school-based decision making was implemented in 48 JCPS schools through Participatory Management teams during the 1989-90 school year - prior to the mandates of KERA. Participatory Management was made possible through an unusual alliance between the Jefferson County Teaches' Association (JCTA), the local teachers' union, and the JCPS Board of Education. The JCTA allowed modification of teachers' contracts if the contract requirements interfered with changes teachers wanted to make to improve education.

JCPS promotes the assessment of middle schools through the use of the Middle Grades Assessment Program. The program was developed by the Ford Foundation and the Center for Early Adolescence in North Carolina. The Middle Grades Assessment Program is designed to help middle schools "take a hard look at themselves and chart new directions." Part of the assessment program is a School-Based Planning Survey for Parents. In a series of 44 questions, parents and families provide input for the school on such issues as communication with parents, the attitude of the school in welcoming parents and families, the instructional and assessment program of the school, and their overall perceptions of the school.

Both the Middle School Liaison and the Superintendent indicated that JCPS had "gotten away from doing school/family conferences" in the middle grades. "However," stated the Superintendent, "we are going to reinstate them next fall." District level personnel felt that school/family conferences were a necessary part of communication with parents about the instructional program at the school. School administrators and teachers indicated that school/family conferences that were "built in" as part of staff inservice would be a welcomed addition, even though, as one teacher put it, "it will take some extra time to prepare for conferences." Parents indicated that they were in favor of planned school/family conferences. They felt that the conferences would keep them better informed about their child's progress and what was happening in the school, generally.

JCPS has gained a national reputation for school reform, and many educators consider Louisville to be on the cutting edge of reform efforts. This is due, in part, to the passage of

KERA. However, prior to the passage of KERA, district officials "saw the writing on the wall," as one district administrator put it. JCPS has been involved in reform programs for middle schools since 1989. Louisville, along with four other districts across the nation, launched a partnership with the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. The goal of the partnership is "to provide disadvantaged students in grades six through nine with what we call an education of 'high expectations, high content, and high support'." JCPS has added two additional "highs" to this list: high involvement and high energy. Three JCPS middle schools are participating in the initiative - Iroquois, Southern and Western - and are known throughout the district as "High^5" schools.

Through a series of workshops called Effective Parenting Information for Children (EPIC), the district has planned for high parent and family involvement. The EPIC program, originally developed in Buffalo, New York, was introduced by the Clark Foundation and adopted by High^5 schools. There are three components of the program: home, school, and community. JCPS High^5 schools have adopted the home and school components. According one district administrator, "the link with the community is strong, and we felt like we really needed to focus on the home/school connection."

The home and school components of the EPIC are described in literature that is distributed to parents and families:

> The school component helps build a child's self-esteem, give the child a sense of responsibility, and helps the child to develop decision making and problem solving skills. These activities are integrated in all content areas as well as separate teacher based guidance sessions, and many teachers have found them helpful in regard to KERA...
>
> The home component offers a supportive network which many families need today. Parents are given useful information and the opportunity to share experiences through specific parent workshops and family oriented activities. Parents may share concerns, support one another, and learn skills to strengthen their role. Through out these workshops, the parent is cited, identified, and encouraged to be the child's primary educator in attitude and behavior...As a result of these workshops, parents become more involved with their children, are more effective parents, and advocate for their children when necessary...

One of the original outcome objectives of the High^5 program was for 10 middle schools (beyond the three High^5 schools) to be involved in the Middle School Initiative, also funded through the Clark Foundation. In 1993-94, 20 of Louisville's middle schools wrote a reform proposal and received planning grants of $4,500 each. Each of the 20 schools provided $1,000 in matching funds. The focus of the Middle School Initiative is to provide planning and staff development for schools undertaking reform.

Both Barret Middle and Thomas Jefferson Middle received Middle School Initiative planning grants. Barret also was selected to participate in the National Alliance for Restructuring Education. Combined with the Middle School Initiative, these partnerships allow Barret school personnel to connect student learning with real-world experiences in the workplace. At Thomas Jefferson, the planning grants will be used to buy instructional materials and provide professional development activities for teachers.

One of the unique partnerships that we discovered during our site visits in JCPS was with the 15th District Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). The 15th District PTA serves Louisville and Jefferson County. It is best characterized by its strength in the number of individual members and chapters. There are currently over 77,000 members and 140 chapters in the Louisville/Jefferson County area. As the 15th District PTA President told us, "the PTA in Louisville is larger than the entire PTAs of over 30 states in the nation." The President not only is an active mother (she has been involved in PTA activities since her high school children were in kindergarten), but also she is employed by JCPS in a support staff position. She served on the search committee for the current superintendent. When we asked the superintendent about the partnership between JCPS and the PTA he said, "There is a long history of 15th District involvement. The former superintendent nurtured the relationship, and I want to continue that. The 15th District is one of our strongest supporters in reform, and even advocates for us at the General Assembly."

In almost every interview we conducted, the PTA was mentioned as a strong source of support both at the district and individual school levels. It was interesting to note that many parents, family members, school administrators, and teachers mentioned the 15th District's involvement in training. Parents/family members commented that the PTA had helped them in their roles on the site-based management teams; school administrators and teachers often said that "the 15th District knows more about KERA than we do. They have even provided some training to help us understand the reforms."

The second group of initiatives represent the partnerships created between JCPS and local businesses that benefit either all schools in the district, or business/school partnerships

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

with middle schools. JCPS fosters a dynamic relationship with the business and professional community of Louisville and Jefferson County. The National Alliance of Business Distinguished Performance Award for the Outstanding Business/Education Partnership Program of the Year and the National Association of Partners in Education McKee Award, and the National Public Relations Association Award are three of many awards and recognitions JCPS has received for its partnerships with businesses and the community. Because of the scope of the partnerships, it would be impossible to detail each one of them. We concentrated on those partnerships that affect all district schools, and the partnerships in the middle schools that we visited. We also were fortunate to visit two of the district's magnet schools and explore their partnerships in order to gain an understanding of the range of experiences available to middle grade students as they transition to high school.

Humana, Inc. JCPS and Humana, Inc., a national health service provider, have been in partnership since 1984. The New Kid in School project provides computers in every classroom in JCPS. Humana, Inc. provided the start-up and continuing funds for implementing the program, and its employees provide technical assistance to schools, as needed.

Louisville Third Century. Louisville Third Century is an organization whose purpose is to improve the quality of life in the Louisville area. More than 400 businesses and professional members work with JCPS to provide Job Shadowing experiences for middle grade students. Students in High^5 project schools participate in these Job Shadowing experiences.

Louisville Education and Employment Partnership (LEEP). The Middle School Liaison told us, "With help from LEEP, we're implementing the Boston Compact - but only the parts that work." The National Alliance of Business has been in partnership with JCPS since 1988 to implement a program that focuses on academic and workplace readiness. Diverse funding from the city of Louisville, Jefferson County government, JCPS, the Louisville Chamber of Commerce, the Private Industry Council of Louisville and Jefferson County, Metro United Way and the Greater Louisville Economic Development Partnership provided seed money for the project and continuing resources for LEEP.

Kentuckiana Education & Workforce Institute (KEWI). In 1990 the Louisville Chamber of Commerce, with seed money provided by the James Graham Brown Foundation, established

KEWI. Over 300 industry and education leaders participate in 25 industry subcommittees and task forces to outline the needs of the workforce in Louisville. JCPS is actively involved in KEWI; JCPS personnel serve as chairs/co-chairs on these subcommittees and task forces.

Jefferson County Public Schools/Gheens Professional Development Academy. Recognizing the need for quality staff development, the Gheens Foundation awarded a development grant to JCPS in 1983. The purpose of the Academy is to link the professional development of JCPS staff with innovations in education. Originally the Gheens foundation provided 90 percent of the funding for the Academy. By 1994, JCPS provided over 75 percent of the $8 million budget.

Sports Club. Funded by the Gheens Foundation, the Sports Club is a cooperative venture between JCPS and the Old Kentucky Home Council of the Boy Scouts of America. The purpose of the program is to increase student motivation and self-esteem through participation in a basketball league held each Saturday from November through March. The league is composed of teams from five JCPS middle schools. Students are required to pass all academic subjects in order to play on their teams. "This 'pass to play' rule is really a motivator for the kids," the director of the program told us, "and parents are really excited that their kids are doing so well." If a student does not pass a subject, the Saturday sessions are devoted to tutoring. Tutoring sessions are conducted by parents and business people from each community.

School-Based Partnerships. Through the Coordinator of Business Involvement, each middle school in JCPS has the opportunity to be partnered with a local business. "Some businesses are more 'popular' than others," the Coordinator told us, "but my job is to see that opportunities exist for businesses to be partnered with the schools. At first I had to recruit business involvement; now businesses and schools call me asking for partners." Barret Traditional Middle, for example, is partnered with Baptist East Hospital. The hospital provides staff to work with students, and the technology lab at Barret is equipped with state-of-the-art equipment. Iroquois Middle is partnered with Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Kentucky. Employees are available to serve as mentors and speakers, and Blue Cross participates in the Job Shadowing experience for Iroquois students. According to the Youth Services Center coordinator, the partnership is intended to increase parent and family involvement in the school, and to improve student self-esteem. Thomas Jefferson Middle is partnered with Capitol Holding, and is exploring a partnership with Kentucky Fried Chicken.

These partnerships appear to expand the traditional "Adopt-A-School" model; businesses provide much more than token human and fiscal resources for the schools. The Coordinator of Business Involvement said, "We see these as real partnerships intended to help both schools and businesses to improve schools. I won't tell you that all businesses and schools participate equally. We have some partnerships where there is less involvement. I see less and less of that; schools and businesses understand that they are in this together, and we try to foster that kind of relationship."

District communication with parents, families, the community. One of the keystones to parent, family, and community involvement is communication. The district's Division of Internal & External Communications publishes an extensive amount of information for parents, families, the community, and the professional staff:

- Program brochures and newsletters, for example on the Network Partnership and the High^5 project (*High^5 Highlights*), provide detailed information on the purposes and objectives of the program, and news articles about events at school.
- A brochure on the 15th District PTA outlines goals and activities undertaken by the PTA at both the district and local school levels.
- The *Homeroom Connection* is a four-page newsletter that is printed for the Louisville community. It contains articles about events at schools throughout JCPS in an attractive and readable format. The newsletter is printed monthly.
- JCPS *partners*, printed quarterly, is a one-page update on business partnerships with schools.
- *Monday Memo* is a weekly four-page newsletter for the professional staff of JCPS. In brief, one-paragraph articles, it highlights events happening throughout the week in JCPS schools, and recognizes the achievements of JCPS staff in its "Kudos" section.
- Yearly, JCPS publishes a parent calendar. The calendar highlights important dates and events (for example, academic competition dates, enrollment dates for optional/magnet programs, and dates for sports tournaments and championships) and gives contact information for all JCPS Administrative Offices.

- *Middle School Student Success: Tips for Parents and Guardians* is distributed to all middle school parents/family members at the beginning of the school year. This colorful brochure emphasizes the partnership of schools and parents and families in working toward student success. The brochure addresses adolescent development and its relationship to student success, homework, communication with teachers, in-class assignments, how to study for different subjects, television viewing, and note taking.
- The *Pinnacle* is the annual report of JCPS. It provides both a broad overview of district programs and accomplishments, and detailed information on outcomes for the district.
- In addition to printed materials, JCPS operates a Homework Hotline for both students and parents and families. The Hotline is staffed by JCPS professional staff who also serve as mentors for students who help other students with homework problems.

In our interviews with district staff and parents, communication was cited as both important and necessary. Although written materials are important, most of our informants stressed that verbal, personal, one-on-one communication is a key to successful parent, family, and community involvement.

Several of our respondents mentioned that the local news media, specifically the newspapers, had a negative effect on the efforts of school reform. Parents and teachers expressed some anger and disappointment at the coverage of JCPS by the media. One district administrator said, "Sometimes the media seems to want to create the news, not just report it." All of our informants, however, were positive about the way that JCPS communicates with parents, families, and the community.

School-based planning, design, and implementation. At the school level, parents, families, and community members play an active role in planning, designing, and implementing programs. Parents/family members serve on the Participatory Management Teams at each school. They provide input, along with teachers and the school administrator, about the instructional and operational programs of the school. They are key players in the PTA, volunteering their time in classroom, tutoring students, and raising funds for the school. At the middle schools that we visited, we found a cluster of programs, strategies, and activities that are designed and implemented to create a partnership between parents, families, and the surrounding community and the school.

One of the core beliefs about middle grade education is that middle schools do not need to look like either elementary schools or "small high schools." Interdisciplinary teaming, cooperative learning, thematic units, and the formation of small teams, or "families" are approaches that are central to the middle schools philosophy. In the middle schools that we visited, all are implementing some or all of these components. The teachers that we interviewed believe that these components make the school "more accessible and understandable." Parents indicated that having contact with a group of teachers, "where everyone knows my child's abilities and progress," facilitated communication with the school.

Youth Services Centers are mandated through KERA to serve middle grade students who live in an area where 20 percent of the student population is eligible for free or reduced price meals. Schools must apply for a grant from the General Assembly to operate a Youth Services Center. Once a center has been opened in a school, all students and their families are eligible to receive services. The purpose of the centers is to enable students to succeed in school by assisting them and their families in meeting basic needs.

The Youth Services Center at Iroquois began with a $78,000 grant from the state. At the outset, a program coordinator was hired, and the school provided a room for the Center. In addition to the coordinator, the program staff includes a clerk, a Parenting Education Coordinator, a half-time social worker, five part-time mental health counselors, a half-time Career Development Coordinator, and a visiting nurse.

Services and programs provided by centers may include: mental health counseling, family counseling, mentor groups, positive self-image classes, cultural empowerment groups, stop smoking groups, career and vocational counseling, job shadowing, business luncheons, attendance improvement program, YMCA Childcare, PTA Clothes Closet, and EPIC Parent Education Programs. During the 1993-94 school year, the Youth Services Center conducted a districtwide workshop for parents, families, and the community entitled *Mission Possible '94: Family Empowerment Can Happen*. The workshop featured local and state keynote speakers and breakout sessions on diverse topics such as "Oh No! The Terrible Teens!," "The Parent

Is a Child's First Teacher," "But Who Will Watch the Children?," "HIV, AIDS, and Schools," and "Parents as Partners in Education."

Our respondents indicated that the Youth Services Center provides a valuable service to the school community. They stated that providing all services under one roof relieves some of the frustration that parents and families feel when trying to deal with service providers.

The Neighborhood Place at Thomas Jefferson Middle is similar to the Youth Services Center concept. In 1990, JCPS and the Louisville Education & Employment Partnership began exploring ways to connect parents and families with service providers. The idea for a Regional Service Center - the Neighborhood Place - took shape. At the beginning of this initiative, twelve agencies began meeting on a monthly basis. The meetings were designed to decide what services were needed and would be provided, to provide training and technical assistance, and to shape a confidentiality agreement.

The result of this planning was that seven service providers - Jefferson County Department of Human Services and Department of Health, City of Louisville, JCPS, Private Industry Council, Cabinet for Human Resources, Department of Social Services and Department of Social Insurance, and Seven Counties Services, Inc. - have staff available at the school site. Each of these agencies allocated staff to the Neighborhood Place; a total of 19 staff people provide services to parents and families. Available services to eligible families include financial assistance, health services that include immunizations and a well-child program, assessment services that include mental health and chemical dependency, and employment/training services that include screenings and referrals.

The notable difference between the Youth Services Center and the Neighborhood Place is that the Neighborhood Place serves a regional area. Not all parents and families at Thomas Jefferson are eligible for services because Thomas Jefferson is a Magnet School and many students are bussed from other communities. Parents/family members and school personnel indicated a desire to be able to serve all families in the school, and the principal stated, "We're working on trying to arrange services for all of the families at Thomas Jefferson."

Parent, family, and community involvement in local school sites is accomplished through a wide variety of strategies and activities. It is important to understand that these strategies and activities are planned, designed, and implemented from the strong belief that the partnerships created with schools will help to reform schools, and ultimately benefit students. Through school written materials, interviews, and observations, we identified many primary strategies and activities that schools employ to involve parents, families, and the community. Below we highlight some of the more unusual strategies that we found:

- Creating a Welcoming Environment - In the schools that we visited, the entrances were designed around a theme. For example, at Iroquois Middle, the entrance was decorated to resemble a park with benches and trees.
- Parent Centers - Schools provide a room for parents to meet, relax, and talk about their concerns, or make materials to take home to work with their children.
- Student Guides - Middle School Guides are distributed to students and their parents and families at the beginning of the school year. The Student Guide at Barret Traditional Middle is a particularly interesting example of the expectations that the school sets for parent and family involvement. In the Principal's Message he states, "The Traditional Program expects a high degree of parental involvement. Both the Alliance [The National Alliance for Restructuring Education] and the Kentucky Education Reform Act share this expectation." Homework policies also speak to parent and family expectations: "Parents/Guardians are expected to encourage regular, organized study; to show interest in assignments; to expect satisfactory performance; and to provide the proper conditions for home study." The Guide concludes with a statement that requires parent and family commitment to the Traditional Program. A tear-out sheet, which parents are required to sign and return to the school, certifies that they have read the Student Guide and agree to conform to all rules and regulations of the school, and pledge their support for the concepts, goals, and views of the Traditional Program.
- Voice Mail System - Parents, families, and communities may communicate directly with school administrators and teachers about events at school, concerns about student progress, or other general information.
- Phone Tree - Parents and family members are organized to "spread the word" about important school events. Each parent, family member is assigned a cluster of other parents to call.

- Neighborhood Newsletters and Papers - Staff, parents, family members, and community members frequently contribute articles of interest about middle schools to local neighborhood newsletters and papers.
- Involving Parents and Family Members in School Improvement Efforts - parents/family members at Barret serve on the school Total Quality Management Team. They offer suggestions about improving the quality of the school environment, and address quality in instruction and curriculum.
- Celebrations for Parents - Breakfast with Dad, Proud to be a Parent, a Thanksgiving Day Dinner where students and faculty serve parents/family members, and other events at school celebrate the involvement of parents and family members.
- Center for Leadership in School Reform - Through the Middle School Initiative and the National Alliance for Restructuring Education, staff at Barret Middle worked with the Center for Leadership in School Reform to identify ten focus areas for school improvement. Two of these focus areas directly related to parent, family, and community involvement. The purpose of the Community Service Support Focus is to identify and service Barret student family needs. School teams hold meeting to identify these needs. The Parents' Focus has two purposes. First, parent and family involvement is encouraged by publishing a monthly list of places where family members can be of help to the school and the students. Second, parent and family involvement is encouraged through a program of educating parents and families about class expectations; when and how to voice concerns and questions, or give positive input in classroom processes and procedures; and providing a safe and risk-free environment for families by assuring them that students will not suffer as a result of their involvement.
- Principal's Night Out - Once a month the principal is available, on campus, for parents and families to come and visit.
- Junior Achievement - Community members are involved with middle schools through the Junior Achievement program. Students learn business operations through the manufacture and sale of products, and community members report that these experiences keep them "in touch with kids, and with the schools."

In addition to these strategies and activities, parents/family members themselves organize the events in which they are involved.

- Fund Raisers - The funding formula for schools mandated through KERA has reduced the amount of financial resources available to individual schools. The PTA at each school sponsors major fundraising events to supplement available local and state funds. At one middle school, the sale of candy raised over $47,000 for the school budget.
- PTA Programs - the PTA sponsors student achievement awards programs; "transition" programs to help parents and families understand the transition from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school; training programs for local PTA school officers; a Teen Image Program; and a "Parent to Parent" program as a way for parents to communicate with each other about their middle school experiences.
- Service Learning - one parent at Barret Middle serves as the Service Learning Coordinator for the school.

Teacher-based planning, design, and implementation. Teachers are actively involved in planning and designing activities for involving parents. It is not surprising that most of the teachers we talked with see these activities as directly related to improving the achievement of students in their classrooms. Most feel that "we try to do a good job of involving parents, but we leave the school year feeling like we haven't done enough." Teachers envision their role in parent and family involvement as encouraging parents and families to become active in their child's learning, or as players in the bigger picture of parent and family involvement at the school level. We came away with a picture of teachers either serving on school committees that were dealing with parent and family issues and how to address them, or working individually or within their middle school "family" to increase parent and family involvement.

Teachers feel that the needs of students, both basic needs (e.g., food and clothing) and academic needs, are best met through individual school teams or families.

- Meeting Student Basic Needs - Teachers often expend their own personal resources, both time and money, to help students and their parents and families. For example, in one school the teachers responded to the basic needs of a family when a student who had been chosen for an achievement award was not present because he had no shoes. Teachers bought shoes for the student and helped the family with other clothing needs. In another instance, a child needed a haircut and clothing. Teachers provided for these needs. In these ways teachers expressed that they feel more "connected" to the parents and families of the students they teach.

- Meeting Student Academic Needs - Teachers have organized Portfolio Parties where both students and parents meet with the teacher to discuss the process of portfolio assessment and the portfolios of individual students. Performance Events, where students demonstrate their learning, are held on a regular basis. Parents and community members work with students on thematic units. For example, on a unit entitled "Pioneer Days," parents/family members and community members came into classrooms and taught students about quilting, square dance and clogging, and the care and training of horses. Teachers work individually with parents and families on homework activities. Explanation of assignments and strategies for helping students are discussed. Teachers at Thomas Jefferson have organized a Parent/Guardian/Adult Day. They invite parents to sit in the classrooms and observe their style of teaching. The time is not spent in individual conferences, but rather is intended to give parents and families a "flavor of how we teach and who we are." Teachers in one middle school have applied for a grant to work with parents/family members and students to help them understand and develop rubrics for portfolio development.
- Communication with Parents and Families- Teachers cite communication with parents and families as a necessary component of their work. Some middle schools hold regularly scheduled conferences. Telephone contact with parents was named by teachers as their primary communication tool. In one school, teachers give parents and families their home telephone numbers so that parents/family members may contact them at night "before a problem gets out of hand." Teachers often call parents and families about "positive progress, good things that are happening at school." Some teachers indicated that they had visited in their students' homes.

Challenges

What challenges does parent, family, and community involvement present for JCPS personnel and middle grade parents, families, and the community? What strategies have been used to overcome these challenges?

"Change is not always easy," one principal said, "and there are always barriers when you try to change an entire system." Although the picture of parent, family, and community involvement in JCPS is promising and offers many lessons for both large and small districts, challenges still remain for JCPS professionals and the parents, family members, and community of Louisville.

Through our interviews with school personnel, parents, family members, and those community members who work with the middle schools, we identified five basic challenges to involvement in JCPS: the characteristics of schools, the characteristics of families, communication, resources, and reform legislation. Interestingly, the majority of our respondents spoke of challenges in terms of ways parents and families and communities "can't be involved." It was rare to hear comments that indicated that parents and families did not "want to be involved" in their children's education.

Characteristics of schools. Both school personnel and parents/family members see the size and organization of schools as a barrier. In response to our question about challenges to parent, family, and community involvement, one informant's observations are illustrative:

> How do you break down this institution we call 'school' so that it's inviting and not a threat to parents? It seems that no matter how hard we try to make it so that parents want to come here, we still hear that school is a forbidding place. Maybe it's the size of the school. We serve over 1,300 kids here. That's larger than some small towns. Maybe it's the change to the middle school concept that puts parents off. Somehow we've got to get the message to parents and families that they are welcome, and that we want them to be involved in their kid's education.

A community member that works with the schools said, "When I first came here I was overwhelmed. There are so many kids and teachers. I needed to learn how to navigate the system." Parents and family members, too, feel that the school is a challenge to their involvement. Parents and family members told us that "middle schools are so much different than elementary schools," and "there are so many more teachers to deal with, and I don't always understand the subject matter."

District administrators and personnel felt that the district's open enrollment policy and forced bussing of students under the desegregation order have an effect on parent and family involvement. "Many of the kids in a school don't live in the same neighborhood; it makes it very difficult for a parent to get to the school, or for the teachers to get into the community."

Characteristics of families. Increasing numbers of women in the work force, the absence of a parent through death or divorce, and children living with family members other than their natural parent(s) were cited by school personnel as barriers to involvement. One teacher said, "I have learned to ask my students the name of the person I'll be talking with; more frequently than not the person they live with doesn't have the same last name." Parents often mentioned that their status as single-parent, working fathers and mothers prevented them from being as involved as they would like to be.

Communication. "Communication is a two-way street," said one of our respondents. "We have an obligation to communicate with parents, but they have an obligation to communicate with us, too." Generally, both school personnel and parents and families felt that the district and the schools did a good job of communicating about what was happening at school through newsletters, announcements, and the public media. Communication problems, when they exist, usually are focused at an individual level between teachers and parents/family members. "I try to talk to each student's parent or a family member at least once a semester, but with over 150 students that's hard," said one teacher. A parent said,"I know I should talk with the teachers, but with my work schedule, there's little time left in my day."

Resources. Time, money, staff development, and lack of personnel to deal specifically with parent and family involvement were the most frequently cited challenges to involving parents and families and the community in schools. Teachers feel pressures of daily preparations and paperwork. Parents are constrained by work schedules and dealing with "family life" situations. The majority of teachers we talked with felt that hiring someone whose job focused solely on involving parents and families in school could resolve many of the challenges, although few schools could afford such a position.

District officials were concerned about the funding formula imposed by KERA. "Our district, because of the equalization formula, send out about $8 million dollars a year," one district administrator told us. "That places a great burden on us to find other funding sources." School administrators and teachers indicated that KERA policies concerning Youth Services Centers were a welcomed addition to addressing family needs, but that obtaining a grant from the state to implement a Center was highly competitive. "There's a waiting list, and even though we've applied for funding, it may be several years before we are able to get a Center," a principal told us.

School administrators and teachers told us that staff development efforts that focused on parent, family, and community involvement were needed. Teachers, especially, wanted information and training on how to reach "hard-to-reach" families, and both new and proven strategies for communicating with parents.

Reform legislation. The Kentucky Education Reform Act is unique because it is seen by school personnel both as a support for change and reform, and as a challenge to involving parents and families and the community in schools. The funding formula for equalizing funds to all districts in the states is problematic for some, decreasing the amount of funds in more populated, wealthier districts like JCPS. Both the district and individual schools are forced to compete for external funds.

School administrators and teachers see curriculum and instructional reforms, especially the statewide assessment system that includes performance and portfolio assessment, as challenges to parent, family, and community involvement. Expressing the view of many of the teachers we talked with, one teacher said, "We're focusing on the 'book,' and losing the child. I don't have any doubt that we will see Kentucky students that are more literate, able to write better papers; I worry that we are not focusing on the 'whole child' and are missing some very important things. That includes how we deal with parents and families."

Finding new and unique ways to deal with these things that hinder parent, family, and community involvement is, in itself, a challenge to many of those with whom we spoke. We found the following strategies and activities. Some are employed at the district level; most are used in specific buildings by administrators, support personnel, and teachers.

- De-emphasis on "marketing" of schools and competition
- Arranging school schedules to meet the time constraints of parents, for example evening meetings, or meetings in community locations such as churches

- Forming middle school teams, or "families," that break down the number of students and parents and families that teachers interact with
- Hiring a parent coordinator/liaison
- Creating a welcoming environment for parents and families and the community, both in the physical plant and in the attitudes of school personnel
- Home visits

Supports

Both internal and external support systems are necessary for successful school reform. JCPS endeavors to insure success through careful planning, and building systems to support change. A key characteristic that we found among JCPS administrators and teachers was that they are risk-takers. They are also entrepreneurial in their approaches to building support; they do not fear failure. "We won't always succeed," said one administrator, "but that won't stop us from trying other things and exploring every option to involve parents and the community in our schools."

We were especially interested in how JCPS uses research and program information, and what resources are available as it attempts its school reform initiatives. Additionally, we found that the leadership in the district was a key internal support for involving parents and families and the community.

When we asked about the restructuring or reform initiatives that impact middle schools, district administrators mentioned Ted Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools (JCPS participates in that program), the work of the National Alliance for School Restructuring, and the Center for Leadership in School Reform. Specific to middle grades, the work of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation through their Program for Disadvantaged Youth, and the reports by Anne Lewis on the progress of the schools involved in reforms efforts that they fund. School administrators often mentioned, though not specifically by name, materials available to them from the National Middle School Association. When we inquired about the research base for parent, family, and community involvement, the general body of work by Joyce Epstein, work from Don Davies' League of Schools Reaching Out (with whom the district has worked), and Anne Henderson's work with the National Committee for Citizens in Education were the most frequently mentioned.

Teachers indicated that they have little time to read current research. "I'm so busy getting ready for teaching, that's about all I have time for," was a recurrent theme. Strategies and activities employed by teachers seem to be based more on an intuitive knowledge that parent and family involvement will help their students. Improved academic performance and parent and family satisfaction were outcomes that were cited by teachers as evidence that parent and family involvement "works."

Both the state and local levels provide funding for parent, family, and community involvement. At the state level, monies are allocated for the planning, design, and implementation of the Youth Services Centers. As mentioned earlier, these grants are competitive and, at present, only the schools judged to be most in need have been awarded these grants. At the local level, parent, family, and community involvement is budgeted as a line item in the total budget. The total budget during the 1993-94 school year was $211,267. Of these funds, 100 percent is met from either local or state sources. Over the last three years, the funding level for parent, family, and community involvement has remained approximately the same. Approximately 60 percent of the budget is allocated for salaries and benefits; 40 percent is spent on materials and supplies. The district and individual schools receive substantial fiscal and in-kind resources from the business community; no exact figures were available for this support. From grant sources during the period from 1987-1991, grant dollars increased from slightly over $6 million to $16.6 million.

Leadership at both the district level and at the school level was frequently mentioned as a support for parent, family, and community involvement initiatives. It was obvious that the former JCPS Superintendent had nurtured the relationship between the district and the business community. He was held in high regard by the majority of our respondents and was often cited as the reason that parent, family, and community involvement is "so strong in Louisville." When he left the district in 1992, the School Board made every effort to ensure that his successor's philosophy included the belief that parents and families and the community should and would be involved in education. In our interview with the current superintendent, he spoke about his philosophy of parent, family, and community involvement:

> We've got to... involve adults. I can't ask parents to do that anymore because both parents have to work to make it; single parents are having to work. You can't ask a parent to do any more than they can mentally or physically handle. Only between 20 and 30 percent of our parents spend significant time - at most a half hour a day - with their kids. Someone has to do it. We can't

> stretch the teachers any more, so it's got to be some adult/student contact. It may be volunteers. We've got to reattach ourselves to intergenerational centers. The elderly have a lot to offer and can do something; when you can convince them, they'll tie back in. What all this means is that there is probably a continuum - that we need to reattach adults back into the schools, because the kids need it. And I'm not so sure that the adults don't need it, too. That extends all the way from parents - on the family literacy kind of thing - to asking our elderly to come back in to help with programs.
>
> This district does just an incredible job with its business community. It's powerful. We've got to sustain that somehow. We've got to market, but education doesn't know how to market. We've got to link up with communities, with service. That work is going to be everything in the future. We've got some things here that have a great potential.

School personnel and parents/family members often complimented building administrators for their leadership in parent, family, and community involvement. "I don't know about other principals," said one parent, " but ours really makes an all-out effort to get everyone involved at the school. Every parent, every teacher, and the entire community. We feel like this is 'our' school and that we have a part in it."

Outcomes

A study conducted by The Kyle Group, Inc., of Cambridge, MA, for the JCPS/Gheens Professional Development Academy, found that during the period from 1988-1991, middle school parent satisfaction, judged by parent participation in school activities, had increased by 69 percent in a group of schools that had been actively involved in reform, 56 percent in schools that were beginning to explore reform, and 44 percent in schools that were satisfied with their current status.

In *Gaining Ground* and *Changing the Odds*, both written as interim reports for the Clark Foundation, Anne Lewis details outcomes based on interviews with key informants in the district that Louisville middle schools involved in the High^5 project have achieved: strong connections with the community; and increased parent, family, student, and teacher satisfaction.

The efforts to involve parents, families, and community members in the education process have supported traditional roles for parents, e.g., as volunteers in classrooms or working at fund raising activities, and created new roles, e.g., as parent mentors for other parents or serving in governance roles on Participatory Management Teams. The community, too, is involved in schools; community and business members give their time and resources to support school reform efforts. They work as tutors and mentors; they provide staff development; they help to shape the reform of public education in Jefferson County through their participation on local boards and in committees that work with the district.

Changes in attitudes are the most surprising and unanticipated outcome to those that participate in school reform. "I didn't realize how much I would enjoy working with the schools," said one community member. One teacher reflected: "I always gave lip service to parent involvement; working with our parents and families has really changed how I believe!" "I've seen how much my child has improved since I started coming to school and being active. I can hardly believe the results," recounts a middle school parent.

Lessons

What have we learned? The lessons from Louisville are important for those districts and schools that want to succeed in involving parents, families, and community members and businesses in their reform efforts. Particularly, these lessons should be encouraging to middle grade educators. We heard of middle grade "parent burn-out;" middle schools who wanted more involvement; and middle grade parents who wanted to be more involved. But we also heard the success stories of those parents and family members who are involved; middle schools where parents are key players in reform; businesses and community members who are actively helping schools to restructure and find "a new way of doing business." Parents, family members, school personnel, community leaders, and professionals in Louisville do not claim to have all of the answers for successful middle parent, family, and community involvement. They do have a willingness and openness to share their lesson so that others may learn and benefit from them.

1. *Clear goals and policies, coupled with funds to meet the goals, provide a framework for successful parent, family, and community involvement initiatives.*

   Both state mandates and clearly articulated district goals, supported by funding at the state and district levels, are keys to this successful program.

2. *State mandates can be used to local advantage.*

   JCPS has taken advantage of the reform mandates of KERA to provide comprehensive programs that include multiple opportunities for parents, families, and the community to be involved in their children's education.

3. *Coordination and involvement of the community is a key to successful restructuring.*

   Efforts to involve parents, families, and the community are carefully coordinated at the district and school level to reduce duplication of services and provide maximum impact for the restructuring initiatives.

4. *Communication with the larger community is a key to success.*

   The district communicates its goals to parents, families, and the community at large on a frequent, on-going basis. This pattern of communication ensures support for restructuring efforts.

Minneapolis Public Schools
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Case Study

The Family and Community Partnerships program (FCP) in Minneapolis Public Schools falls under the umbrella of the Department of Teaching and Learning, and is an expansion of the former Volunteer Services Department. The FCP program is seen as a system for strengthening student achievement by providing support to Minneapolis schools as they implement the family/community involvement elements of their Building Profile plans.

A unique feature of the Minneapolis Public Schools is its administrative and organizational structure. In 1993 the Minneapolis school board entered into a contract with a local for-profit consulting firm to oversee the 44,000-student district. The contract holds the superintendent (the consulting firm's CEO) and other school officials financially accountable for a set of objectives. One of the highlights of this performance-based contract was to devise a strategy to increase family involvement in schools.

Context

Statewide Reform. In 1990, the Minnesota State Board of Education and the State Department of Education issued *Challenge 2000*, a comprehensive plan to improve schooling in the state. One of the primary challenges issued in this document was: "Give educators, parents, and community members the encouragement, flexibility, and support needed to improve their schools." Leadership at the state level acknowledged that empowering parents to be full participants in school reform was both necessary and critical.

> Empowering parents to get involved is an important and necessary goal. Part of empowering people - parents and caregivers - is to first believe in them and their capacities to get involved. We need to ask ourselves: How welcoming do we make parents in our schools and classrooms? What role have we created for them - and, have we bothered to inform them of what their role is or should be? And, have we made it convenient for them to access and communicate with teachers and other school staff? Schools must be more accessible, give parents a meaningful role, and foster a sense of partnership. (*Challenge 2000*, p. 11)

Three key pieces of state legislation address parent/family and community involvement in Minnesota schools:

- Enrollment Options Program - allows students (K-12) to enroll in a district other than the one in which they live;
- Community education legislation - encourages maximum community use of the public schools and avails the human resources of the community to the schools. Community

education is also the mechanism through which the Early Childhood Family Education Program is delivered to young children and their families; and

- Parent involvement legislation - requires the development of guidelines and model plans for parent, family, and community involvement programs.

While the Enrollment Options Program and community education legislation are important in understanding the larger environment within the state, during our site visit we were primarily interested in learning about the parent involvement legislation and its components.

Minnesota parent involvement legislation contains four requirements for parent, family, and community involvement programs. First, programs will engage the interests and talents of parents or guardians in recognizing and meeting the emotional, intellectual, and physical needs of their school-age children. Second, programs will promote healthy self-concepts among parents or guardians and other family members. Third, programs will offer parents or guardians a chance to share and learn about educational skills, techniques, and ideas. Fourth, programs will provide creative learning experiences for parents or guardians and their school-age children.

In addition to these requirements the law specifies that model plans for parent, family, and community involvement programs must include at least the following:

- program goals and means;
- methods for informing parents or guardians in a timely way about the program;
- strategies for ensuring the full participation of parents or guardians, including those parents or guardians who lack literacy skills or whose native language is not English;
- procedures for coordinating the program with the K-12 curriculum, with parental involvement programs currently available in the community, and with other education facilities and programs located in the community;
- strategies for training teachers and other school staff to work effectively with parents and guardians;
- procedures for parents and guardians and educators to evaluate and report progress toward program goals; and
- a mechanism for convening a local community advisory on parent involvement composed primarily of parent or guardians.

Required activities in the model plans must include:

- educational opportunities for families that enhance children's learning development;
- educational programs for parents or guardians on families' education responsibilities and resources;
- the hiring, training, and use of parental involvement liaison workers to coordinate family involvement activities and to foster communication among families, educators and students;
- curriculum materials and assistance in implementing home and community-based learning activities;
- technical assistance, including training to design and carry out family involvement programs;
- family resource centers;
- parent training programs and reasonable and necessary expenditures associated with training sessions;
- reports to parents on children's progress;
- use of parents as classroom volunteers, tutors and aides; or
- soliciting parents' suggestions in planning, developing and implementing school programs.

Given the strong policy emphasis on parent, family, and community involvement at the state level, we were interested in exploring the local context and its effects on policy and practices within Minneapolis Public Schools.

Minneapolis/Minneapolis Public Schools. Minneapolis Public Schools has had a strong relationship with other members of the "learning community" due, in part, to its former mayor. Throughout his term as mayor, he kept a clear and public focus on the city's youth. There have been several critical payoffs. One benefit has been getting the community - businesses, schools, government agencies, and families - to sit down and talk to each other. As one informant put it, "It hasn't necessarily been an easy road but there is a growing awareness of how each institution has its own role in working with the community and its families."

Minneapolis, with a population of 368,383, has had an increasing public school enrollment and has added two new schools each year for the past three years. Three years ago, the community passed a referendum to increase taxes to pay for education. This was considered a "coup" for the district, according to one informant, because only 17% of the families in Minneapolis have children in the schools, and the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce lobbied against the referendum. The community's willingness and trust to pass a referendum in spite of such odds is linked to the mayor's educational initiatives and community awareness of the district's educational programs.

In 1989, Minneapolis lost a well- respected superintendent who left the district to become the chancellor of schools in New York. A new superintendent was hired from outside of the district. He brought different visions of education and sought to force change in the district. According to those we interviewed, several weaknesses emerged. First, he had difficulty working with people and providing the support needed to achieve his vision. Second, he had difficulty in the financial management area. After four years as superintendent, he was asked to resign in 1992.

Although the district's infrastructure was strong, there was a public perception that the district was in crisis. The school board explored numerous options, including hiring someone from within the district or from the community. At that time a local consulting firm was hired to come in and handle management issues, specifically district finances. After the chief executive officer (CEO) of the consulting firm effectively and quickly dealt with these issues, particularly delivering a balanced budget, the general feeling was to hire him to run the whole district. As the school board went through their search process, they asked him to apply for the superintendency, although according to our sources, there was some concern that the CEO was not an educator. During interviews for the superintendency it was reported that he stated that "a superintendent's job is to get the infrastructure and management set up in such a way that the professionals, the teachers, principals, and other administrators, can do their jobs." As part of his contract, he insisted that his compensation be tied to clear performance standards, and a public work plan.

The school board accepted these terms, and during the first months of his superintendency, he examined the organizational structure of the entire district. In the preliminary reorganization of the district three key people were identified to "champion" the following areas:

- student achievement;
- community trust and support; and
- management operations.

The new superintendent chose to work on community trust and support. He publicly acknowledges that trust and support have been damaged and need to be addressed in a very proactive way.

Decision-making authority, including finances, has been moved into the schools. A decentralized system fits closely with the superintendent's philosophy: "The further away you are from the people who the decision affects, the more likely you are for failure." An enterprise system of central administration is another innovative strategy proposed by the superintendent. District services will be designed so that schools can purchase them. If someone or a department is not providing quality and cost effective services and schools aren't purchasing them, then that person or department "goes out of business." Under this system, funding is not guaranteed. Central administrators would operate like consultants and schools would have to decide what services they need and where they're going to get them. According to district personnel with whom we spoke, "...this system forces administrators to examine the necessity, effectiveness, and efficiency of what they are doing."

Minneapolis Public Schools has a long history of involving families and community members in the school system. Adopted in 1967, the district's community relations policy stated that "the Board of Education encourages the use of community resources and citizens to assist in furthering the educational program." The district has revised this throughout the years culminating in the current mission statement:

> The purpose of the Minneapolis Public Schools is to ensure that all students acquire the knowledge, skills, and positive attitude towards self and others to solve problems, think creatively, continue learning and develop their maximum individual potential for leading productive lives to meet their needs in a complex, diverse and changing society. The Minneapolis Public Schools is a learning community of students, staff, families, and citizens. This learning community will work together to provide educational programs of excellence that are integrated, multicultural, gender free, and disability aware. The Minneapolis Public Schools will work with other agencies and members of the learning community in order to accomplish this.

Parent, family, and community involvement activities are coordinated under the Family and Community Partnerships (FCP) program, which is an expansion of the Volunteer Services department. The FCP program is one component of the Department of Teaching and Learning. A new director of the Department of Teaching and Learning began in mid-February, 1994. The new director formerly served in the State Department of Education and is considered "on leave" from the state. The FCP program fits within the Department of Teaching and Learning, but the coordinator expressed some concern that the FCP program may not get immediate attention as curriculum and instruction in the district is a high priority.

The coordinator of the FCP has been in Minneapolis Public Schools for 11 years. Throughout these years, her job has changed, reflecting the district's growing needs and those of its families. She stated, "...although the district's focus is education, it cannot ignore the many factors that impact students and families. Our program addresses these evolving needs by helping families and district staff draw on the community's resources."

After the completion of the Minneapolis School Family Partnership plan in 1992, the coordinator of the FCP program developed a district parent, family, and community involvement policy. The board did not act on the policy because of its wording. The policy has gone through two revisions: one very broad and one very specific. The policy was still pending before the board at the time of our site visit in the spring of 1994.

Program

Planning, Design, and Implementation

The Minneapolis School Family Partnerships plan. The Minneapolis School Family Partnerships plan is a direct outgrowth of the statewide parent, family, and community involvement reform initiative. Beginning in November 1991, and continuing through January 1992, Minneapolis Public Schools began a self-study of parent, family, and community involvement.

All principals and a random sample of classroom teachers responded to a survey about parent/family and community involvement. Results revealed the following: few school policies concerning school-to-home communication, and substantial variation among teachers regarding teacher/parent communication; less than 35% of parents of middle grade students involved in conferences; a dramatic drop in parent/family volunteers at the middle school level; few suggestions from middle grade teachers about how parents can support their child's academic development; and general support for at-home involvement by parents/family members, but less enthusiastic response when asked about onsite, i.e. at-school, involvement.

Ten focus groups were conducted with parents. Parents were asked to respond to questions in five areas: climate, respect, communication, involvement, and governance. Parents/family members cited the convenience and accessibility of the school building, the attractiveness of the facility, and the attitude of the school staff as affecting their comfort and how welcome they felt at school. Consistent, timely, and positive information from the school about their children was desired by the focus group participants. The type and level of parent/family involvement varied with families, but all agreed that parent/family involvement was a key to better education. Finally, parents'/family members' opinions varied on how to be involved in governance of schools; generally, parents/family members wanted more say in the important decisions governing the operation of schools.

In response to this self-study, in January 1992 the superintendent appointed a School/Family Task Force composed of parents, community members, teachers, and administrators that were charged with developing a family involvement plan for the district. In April 1992 the Task Force presented the plan to the district and the community. The plan is organized in five sections:

- Definition of Family Involvement
- Current Research on Family Involvement
- Fundamental Beliefs Regarding School/Family Partnerships in the Minneapolis Public Schools
- District Outcomes for School/Family Partnerships
- Recommendations for Action

Due to the forced resignation of the superintendent at the time the plan was developed and a change to a new administration, during our site visit the FCP coordinator was unclear about the outcome of the School/Family Partnership plan. She told us, "Although no one has said to stop working on parent/family involvement, some parts of the plan cannot be implemented without action by the school board." FCP program staff reviewed program activities and decided that two activities of the School/Family Partnership plan could proceed without board action. First the Department of Teaching and Learning published a staff newsletter called *Family and Community Partnerships*. Second, plans were under way for the Parent Institute to begin during the 1992-93 school year, and program staff implemented the first year of the Parent Institute at the beginning of that school year. During our site visit in the spring of 1994, we found that these activities were being implemented by the Family Community Partnership program.

Family and Community Partnerships. "Family and Community Partnerships" is a monthly newsletter sent to all staff in the district. This newsletter contains "What's Working in Parent Involvement" from the Parent Institute, Fairfax, Virginia, as well as several pages of district and school news. The newsletter offers practical ideas for staff of all levels K-12, and FCP staff views it as a communication vehicle to help district staff implement family involvement as part of their responsibilities.

The Parent Institute. The Parent Institute was beginning its second year in Minneapolis Public Schools during our site visit. Parent Institute literature cites three primary reasons for the creation of the Parent Institute:

- to help parents from diverse backgrounds learn the culture of schools and how to build effective relationships with other parents and school professionals;
- to help schools build diverse leadership teams, by providing a pool of parents who are skilled in educational problem solving; and
- to positively change student achievement through parental involvement.

Although the Parent Institute is open to all parents/family members of Minneapolis Public School students, special emphasis is placed on addressing the needs of parents/families of color and parents/families from low-income households. The curriculum of the Parent Institute is “Educational Empowerment: A Parent Centered Approach” developed by Carol McGee Johnson, who is also the trainer for the Parent Institute.

The Parent Institute helps parents learn to develop relationships with the school as an institution. Specific skills, such as talking with a teacher, are addressed. The program goes beyond helping parents with parenting skills to help them discover the positive things that they can bring to the school culture. The Parent Institute also helps parents examine their rights and expectations in relationship to the school system. They focus on questions such as:

> How do I discover what my own self worth is around education?
>
> What can I bring to the school culture?
>
> How do I bring these things to the table and get some acceptance?
>
> How do I have an impact on what happens to my child, but also on what happens to the school?

Schools are asked to send a parent to a year long training which includes eight seminars (a total of 28 hours). The following three topics are addressed during the seminars:

1) What Parents Bring to the Table: Identifying Strengths and Capacities.
2) What Happens When Parents Put Themselves at Decision-Making Tables: Understanding the Politics of Education.
3) Parents Bringing other Parents to the Table: Parent Organizing.

As part of the Parent Institute, parents/families are encouraged to practice, in their child's school, what they have learned and return to the training to discuss and evaluate what happened. Last year, Minneapolis Public Schools trained a core of parents who are working on projects in their schools to involve other parents. This group of parents will be trainers for the second year of the Parent Institute. Eventually, the consultant will be phased out and all of the trainers will be district parents. It is hoped that this will result in an institutionalization of this program.

Most of the parents who were involved in the Parent Institute during our site visit represent elementary schools, although there are some middle grade parents/family members who participate. The coordinator of the FCP expressed that she was encouraged by the participation of these parents because "...as the parents of elementary aged students become involved, it's likely that they will continue to stay involved, and ultimately the quantity and quality of parent involvement at the middle and high school levels should increase dramatically." She also expressed the importance of involvement at the middle level, terming it "critical." The second year of training in the Parent Institute will focus on developing partnership relationships with parents and will include principals and teachers.

The cost of the training is $125.00 per parent and includes the eight training sessions, meals, and child care. While the cost of the training sessions is high and may be prohibitive for parents/family members in the target population, schools are urged to use school staff development funds, parent organization fund raising, special grants, or funds from business partnerships or other resources to encourage parent/family participation.

Informal evaluation (accomplished through questionnaires to participating parents/family members) of the Parent Institute after the first year revealed that participants and school staff were supportive of the skills gained by parents/families in dealing with the schools in positive ways. The coordinator of the FCP programs told us that she feels that the Parent Institute was successful in their first year because the district administration was so invested and supportive of it.

Coordination of parent, family, and community involvement efforts. One recommendation of the School/Family Partnership plan involved identifying all of the parent involvement efforts in the district. The FCP program staff is working on this coordination effort. The FCP coordinator told us:

> By pulling everyone together, I hope that [all the players] can discuss how to collaborate more and leverage resources. For example, Chapter 1 serves grades K-4 and has traditionally focused on parent training; ...those parents don't tend to move into governance or leadership roles outside of the Chapter 1 program. The FCP office supports these efforts, but I don't think that parent training and education alone really tap into parents as a resource. Also, the Chapter 1 program in Minneapolis does not involve parents at the middle and high school levels. I hope that these parents can move beyond their current roles. We have had four meetings, but attendance has been 'fluid.'

Other districtwide parent, family and community involvement initiatives. In addition to the Minneapolis School Family Partnerships plan, the district is involved in several other initiatives to involve parents, family members, and the community in the education of Minneapolis students. The initiatives that directly involve middle school parents and families include: the Partnership for School Success (a component of which is the Parents and Teachers Headed for Success [PATHS] program); Drug Education Services; parent liaisons; business partnerships; and the tutors and volunteers programs

Partnership for School Success. The Partnership for School Success (PSS) program is a dropout prevention project for middle school youth; it is a joint project between Minneapolis Public Schools and the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota.

The program is funded by the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education and is in its third year. Two other sites, one in Seattle and one in Los Angeles, are also part of the federal grant. The original impetus for the program came in response to the number of students with learning disabilities who were dropping out of school.

The initial plan for the PSS program called for implementation in three middle school sites: Anwatin, Northeast, and Folwell. During our site visit, we were informed that Folwell Middle School was no longer participating in the program. Both Anwatin Middle School and Northeast Middle School were chosen for program participation based on student demographics, high dropout and population mobility. Although the schools are located in different sections of Minneapolis, they share these common characteristics. Additionally, because of the open enrollment policy in Minneapolis schools, students from all sections of Minneapolis attend Anwatin and Northeast Middle Schools. FCP program staff also indicated that the choice of these schools was based on a "probability of success." It was felt that the success rate for the PSS program would be high in these two sites.

The PSS program is targeted at students with learning and behavior difficulties. An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is written for each student. The goal of the program is to discover ways to engage these students in school and keep them interested and involved. One of the foremost strategies is to involve parents and family members. Critical to this strategy is the attitude that parents have contributions to make that are often overlooked. Program staff seek to develop a collaborative working relationship with parents, remembering that parents/families are their clients as well as partners in the educational process. Program staff, in order to move away from a "deficit" model of parent and family involvement, acknowledge that parents and family members have critical knowledge about their children that is an asset as school and families work together for student success.

The program is sensitive to the realities of their families' lives, and FCP staff told us that they "...must deal with the fact that many of these families have been systematically excluded from the school culture in various ways such as the use of educational jargon, frequent meetings, and negative nonverbal communication." Family involvement is viewed as more than just going to the school for school functions and meetings. Program staff believe that parents are a valuable resource for ideas.

For meetings, parents are contacted by letter through the U.S. mail, with follow-up telephone calls. If no contact is made, FCP program staff make home visits. Through many personal contacts, FCP staff and families have grown to know each other well. It appears that trust has been established and families will call FCP program staff to give ideas if they can't attend meetings, or call to find out what they have missed in meetings. Last year 70% of the parents/family members in the PSS program attended at least one meeting during the year.

The PSS program involves parents in a variety of ways, depending on local needs. The principals of Northeast Middle School and Anwatin Middle School (the two schools that participate in the PSS program) stressed that the program dealt with specific "community" issues.

A key component of the PSS program is Parents and Teachers Headed for Success. Both Anwatin and Northeast formed PATHS teams composed of parents/family members and teachers. The PATHS teams at each school participated in the Parent Teacher Action Research (PTAR) project conducted by the Institute for Responsive Education; the Center on Families, Communities, Schools & Children's Learning; and Boston University[1]. Teams from both sites identified home-to-school communication as an area of concern. As a result, both schools have set up "homework hotlines." At Anwatin, home-to-school communication includes a phone and an answering machine in each classroom for homework information and school announcements. Northeast Middle School is also moving to expand their "homework hotline." In addition to these "hotlines" both schools use a number of other strategies to reach families: newsletters, the U.S. mail, and notes sent home with students.

Northeast Middle School and Anwatin Middle School have collaborations with Minneapolis businesses. Northeast Middle School has "partnered" with AT&T for about 5 years. AT&T is assisting with their communications system. Anwatin has partnered with Dain Bosworth (an investment firm) who each year donates a $10,000 scholarship to an 8th grader who graduates from Anwatin. The recipient is "followed" throughout high school until graduation and the start of college. Representatives from Dain Bosworth sit on Anwatin's Leadership Team

---

[1] A full case study of both Anwatin and Northeast Middle School's participation in the PTAR project can be obtained by contacting the Center on Families, Communities, Schools & Children's Learning, Johns Hopkins University, 3505 N. Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21218.

(site-based management team). The principal at Anwatin told us that "Dain Bosworth's most important commitment to Anwatin Middle School is the gift of time." The company's staff has helped students develop resumes and applications and has provided mentorships and "shadowing" opportunities.

Many components of this middle school program could be replicated at other schools and program staff have been contacted for ideas on how to move to a more "user friendly" school. In March of 1994, program staff was scheduled to provide an inservice for educational assistants on how to engage students, develop positive attitudes towards families, and build relationships based on trust and respect. Other staff development efforts are currently informal and focus on helping teachers to view families as a resource, and a positive and welcome addition to the schools.

Drug Education Services. Minneapolis Public Schools' Health Related Services provides programs for both middle and high school students. Each of the middle and high schools have a chemical health specialist. The elementary and K-8 schools have part-time specialists.

The Minnesota Student Survey asks 6th, 9th, and 12th graders questions about a wide variety of topics including AIDS, sexuality, abuse and family violence, and vandalism. It was administered statewide in 1989, 1991, and will be completed again in 1995. Revealed were trends towards increased vandalism, depression, and marijuana use. Many children were living on their own or with adults other than their parents. Eating disorders among teenage girls were decreasing. Staff within the district's Health Related Services watch these trends and use the findings in their programming.

The coordinator of Drug Education Services has been with the district for 14 years, and the district has run a chemical health program for about 20 years. She shared some of the activities that are sponsored by the program:

- Drug education for both children and their parents. During a month long program, students participate during the day and, once a week in the evenings, bring their parents to hear a speaker and participate in related activities.
- *Roots and Wings* is a group program run for 6-8 weeks. Students and their families discuss chemical use in families in the sessions. Funding is a collaborative effort of Hazelton Foundation, the schools, Chapter 1, and the district.

- Cross age mentorships
- Survival skills groups
- A leadership training group called Smart Starts

In our interviews, the coordinator stressed listening and responding to parents and their needs. She told us, " For instance, parents may need support (transportation, child care) in order to participate, but they also want evidence of their learning. One innovative solution we've used is to give parents CECs (Continuing Education Credits)."

The program also emphasizes respect for all levels of family involvement:

> For some families, signing a permission slip is family involvement. For some, going to work to support the family constitutes family involvement. In terms of preventing drug abuse, 'coming through the back door' is more effective than lectures and seminars.

Parent liaisons. The parent liaison program is one of the more institutionalized programs in the Minneapolis Public School System. The parent liaison positions are specific to individual buildings and may be funded by building budgets, grants, business partners, Chapter 1, fundraising, and/or PTA funds. FCP staff told us that "almost all" of the Minneapolis middle schools hire a parent liaison. The liaisons are hired to provide a "point of contact" between the school and the parents/families the school serves. Parent liaisons make home visits, help school personnel contact parents/family members at times that are convenient for the families, and often help parents/families with activities that are related to what their children are learning in school. These positions are valued and supported by the district but depend on building level budgets to fund them.

Business partnerships. The business partnership program is managed through the Youth Trust, a non-profit agency made up of businesses, community agencies and the school district. Business partnerships are initiated with the Youth Trust, but once they are formalized, the FCP program staff provides technical assistance and support. The FCP coordinator told us:

> This is a changing role for our office - moving from a resource provider, for example helping schools identify and recruit volunteers, to being resource consultants, for example helping schools assess their needs and serving as a liaison between the business partner and the school to determine how to best use the services of this business partner.

As previously mentioned, in the two middle schools that we visited, business partnerships had been established. The FCP coordinator told us that business partnerships had been established "in most" middle schools in the district.

Tutors and volunteers. The FCP program office places between 700-800 tutors throughout Minneapolis schools during the year. A speaker's bureau has about 500 available resource speakers. In our interviews with staff from Anwatin and Northeast Middle Schools, we were told that speakers' bureaus have been established. Speakers may be called on to explain program efforts in the schools, and generally "spread the good word" about what is happening in Minneapolis schools. Currently, the majority (about 75%) of these district level volunteers, do not have children in the school system. At the individual school level, however, the percentage is lower because parents/family members frequently serve on the speaker's bureaus.

Challenges

Several challenges to parent, family, and community involvement were identified by our informants. At the state level, there have been no funds set aside for parent and family involvement activities, therefore the extent of technical assistance available to local school districts is limited. This is unfortunate because legislation provides opportunities for in-service training in methods and strategies for involving families in children's learning and development. Additionally, there is a need at the state level to assist local school districts as the develop and implement their model plans for staff development.

Part of the state legislation dealing with parent, family, and community involvement is a requirement that each district spent $5 per pupil on parent involvement activities. However, the state does not provide these monies in addition to normal per pupil allocation. The FCP coordinator identified this requirement as a challenge, although "it makes the state look supportive of parent and community involvement."

School-to-home communication and student mobility were often mentioned as barriers to parent and family involvement. Most frequently our respondents noted that approximately 30% of families targeted by FCP programs had no telephone at home, and that over 30% of the students in their schools "come and go" during the school year.

Middle school staff that we interviewed expressed some frustration with the district's support of parent involvement beyond promoting attendance at school events. One principal expressed concern about the district picking up the funding to keep the PSS program going in the middle schools when the student's currently being served move up to high schools.

There was also concern that each site-based team be allowed to respond to local issues individually in a fashion that respects local diversity and needs.

FCP program staff were concerned "that some staff members still do not have accurate perceptions of students, families, and the 'communities' where families live. Some teachers don't live in the area and aren't actively involved with community events." An additional barrier for these middle schools and their programs is that very few of their students live in the school neighborhood. This compounds many issues surrounding family involvement, such as transportation and accessibility.

Supports

State supports for parent, family, and community involvement include working with those community and social agencies that focus on policies that influence state initiatives. The state has also co-sponsored two conferences on parent involvement. One conference, attended by over 300 participants, was held to initiate a dialog on increasing parent-educator partnerships, and discuss national models of parent involvement. A follow-up conference, co-sponsored by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, focused on parent involvement policies, explored components of Minnesota schools' parent involvement programs, discussed the challenges associated with program implementation, and searched for solutions to those challenges.

Minneapolis Public School consistently use both local and national research data in the planning, development and implementation of their parent, family, and community involvement initiatives. As previously noted district surveys, program evaluation, and focus groups were used in the development of the Minneapolis School Family Partnership plan. Minneapolis middle school staff have also participated in national research projects, including the PTAR project, and the action research approach is highly valued by the district. Minneapolis Public Schools frequently use national resources, for example researchers such as Joyce Epstein, to provide professional development for program staff. The district also has a strong professional library and a librarian who provides current information on parent, family, and community involvement initiatives nationwide.

Minneapolis has seen great community support with its family involvement programs. The FCP coordinator said that "...our program has always had grass roots support and will continue to survive the coming changes. However, I always am concerned about starting programs with grant money that is eventually lost."

The FCP program has received support from supervisors and the district to take advantage of training opportunities. Staff development is seen as a valuable and necessary component for individual professional development. The FCP coordinator told us that she also has tried to support staff development opportunities for her staff. She stresses bringing new information and ideas down to the school level as well.

In response to our questionnaire about program resources, we found that parent, family and community involvement districtwide initiatives are budgeted at both the district and individual school levels. Parent involvement is a separate district budget category, and the yearly budget during the 1993-84 school year was $213,000. This funding level has decreased approximately 2% over the past three years. Of the budget, approximately 75% is spent on salaries and benefits; 25% is spent on materials and supplies.

Outcomes

FCP program staff identified several possible positive outcomes for the districtwide program:

- Increased involvement of middle grade parents in decisionmaking at the local school level;
- A decrease in the student dropout rate of students who participate in the PSS program;
- Increased school-to-home communication through the PTAR research project;
- Greater empowerment of parents and family members who participate in the Parent Institute program;
- Increased participation in the volunteer and tutor programs; and
- Increased community awareness and support for schools, such as the passage of the bond issue.

One interesting unintended outcome was noted by parents who participated in the first year of the Parent Institute training: a move from being viewed as a positive contributor in the school to being viewed as a "trouble maker." A story by one parent is illustrative of this outcome:

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

> As I participated in the program, I began to advocate not only for my own child, but for other children in the school. If I saw a child who needed clothes, or was not being treated fairly in a classroom, I would speak to someone at the school. At first, the principal and teachers were excited that we [parents] were participating in the Parent Institute. They even helped me by paying for me to attend. As the year progressed, it seemed that they 'turned' on me. I don't know what they wanted me to do, but obviously I wasn't living up to what they had expected from the Parent Institute parents. I became viewed as a problem for the school. But that hasn't stopped me from participating. I have a right and an obligation to participate in my child's school.

This view was confirmed by other Parent Institute participants that we interviewed. In interviews with the FCP program coordinator, she stated that this unexpected outcome probably influenced district principals during budget negotiations. Principals that had previously been supportive of FCP program efforts, began to question districtwide parent and community involvement initiatives. Those principals, generally, were ones whose parents were participating in the Parent Institute program.

Lessons

1. *Within an "enterprise system" of education, program success may depend on the ability of program personnel to "sell" parent/family and community involvement as a viable support for restructuring.*

   The administrative performance-based contract sets up a system of competition between restructuring initiatives. If school sites do not choose to "buy" program services, program funding may be discontinued.

2. *In the absence of direct funding, policy mandates provide minimal support for restructuring initiatives.*

   The mandate for parent/family involvement from the state Department of Education does not provide additional funding to districts to implement parent/family involvement programs.

3. *Successful districtwide programs provide training for parents/ family members as they assume new roles and responsibilities.*

   As parents/families assume new roles and responsibilities, especially those that involve decisionmaking, training is a necessary component to ensure success.

4. *Changes in roles for parents/families and community members may be perceived as a threat to school personnel.*

   School administrators have traditionally operated under a model of autonomous decision making. Including parents/families and community members in the decision making process may be perceived as a threat to autonomy and the locus of control in schools.

Fort Worth Independent School District
Fort Worth, Texas

Case Study

The single most effective strategy for mobilizing human resources at all levels can be seen in the partnership symbol . . C^3 (Community, Corporations, Classrooms). This symbol means three equal stakeholders working together to build a better place for our young people.

Project C^3 (Communities, Corporations, and Classrooms) is a partnership between the Fort Worth Independent School District, the Chamber of Commerce and other business leaders that provides the organizational framework for education reform efforts. Project C^3 is a cooperative effort with its origins in community concern over the adequacy of student preparation for the workplace. The purpose of Project C^3 is to operationally define success in the workplace and change the delivery of classroom instruction to link student learning with real world experiences. As a result district performance-based assessments and projects have been developed; the entire community is a "laboratory for learning."

Context

Fort Worth and the Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD). Although statewide initiatives, for example district and campus-level improvement plans required by the Texas Education Agency, guide school reform in Texas, Fort Worth's story is largely one of local control over school reform efforts and the key role that the community has played in those efforts. Fort Worth is located in North Central Texas and is part of the Dallas-Fort Worth Consolidated Metropolitan Area. The City of Fort Worth has a population of over 450,000 and has an ethnic makeup of 60% white, 20% Black, and 19% Hispanic. Because of its mild climate and central location, Fort Worth is home to a wide array of manufacturing, distribution, and corporate headquarter facilities including American Airlines, General Dynamics, Bell Helicopter, Tandy Corporation, IBM, Sky Chefs, Bank One, Burlington Northern Railroad, Union Pacific Resources, and Pier 1 Imports.

The Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD) has a student population of over 72,000 students. It is comprised of 12 high schools, 20 middle schools, 68 elementary schools, and eight special schools, including two alternative middle schools. Prior to 1987 student performance on national norm-referenced tests was below other comparable urban centers; violence, both within the community and Fort Worth schools, was increasing; and there were problems stemming from bussing children under court-ordered desegregation. By bussing children to schools outside the communities, the district was losing the support of parent groups. Additionally, the economy of the area was deteriorating due in part to the planned closing of a local air force base, and loss of defense-related government contracts to General Dynamics and Bell Helicopter.

In 1987 a national search was conducted and FWISD hired a new superintendent. He came to the district from Arkansas where he had been the Chief State School Officer. During our site visit we learned that the superintendent had announced his retirement effective July 1994.

Program

Planning, Design, and Implementation

Our case study of FWISD provides a unique opportunity to explore the role of the community in districtwide programs that involve parents, families, and communities in the reform of education. Project C^3 (Communities, Corporations, and Classrooms) is the programmatic focus of our case study. While we will discuss components of Project C^3 that involve middle grades programs and initiatives, it is important to recognize that they contribute to the overall synergy of districtwide reform efforts.

The initial planning and design of Project C^3 began at the end of the superintendent's first six months in the district. City leaders, through the Chamber of Commerce, expressed concerns about the quality of education in the FWISD. The leaders felt that the economic livelihood of the community was directly related to the quality of schools. One community leader said: "The district is very indicative of whether or not businesses decide to move to the community." The superintendent asked for, and was granted, a year to plan and design a collaborative program between the Chamber of Commerce and the school district that would reform and improve Fort Worth schools.

At the end of the year, the superintendent asked the Chamber to gather 25 Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of the leading community corporations to form a partnership between the district and the community. Initial planning sessions included several conversations between FWISD, the CEOs, and other targeted business leaders. Two guiding principles of the partnership began to emerge. The first principle was that classroom instruction should be linked to real-world application. The primary strategy to be used to accomplish this principle was to identify the skills and knowledge necessary to "operate" in the real world. The second principle was that the entire community should be a "laboratory for learning" for district students. A corollary to the principle was the development of performance driven student assessments and projects. Through these assessments and projects students could work together in problem solving situations to demonstrate proficiency in those skills and knowledge acquired in the classroom.

These guiding principles led to the development of a vision statement for Project C^3. It states:

> All students will acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for success in school, in the workplace, and in life.

FWISD also established goals and objectives for Project C^3. The goal of the project is to transform FWISD into a system of high-performance schools through innovative and long-term partnerships with business, higher education and the community in order to motivate and prepare students for success in further schooling, in the workplace, and in community life. The objectives of the program include:

- Providing opportunities for representatives of business, higher education, and the community to:
    - participate in school life and classroom learning activities;
    - participate in the examination of current practice;
    - provide input into redesigning and restructuring processes; and
    - make changes in their own organizations that facilitate the successful entry of students into higher education, the workforce, and, ultimately, the community.
- Changing the methods and standards for assessing student growth and development in order to match the tasks and criteria used in the workplace and in community life.
- Seeking and supporting ways to assist teachers in changing how subjects are taught and learned, as well as to expand the roles of both teachers and students so that teaching and learning are mutual responsibilities.
- Supporting the ongoing shift of academic and managerial decisionmaking to the school site so that those closest to students and their needs can decide how resources and staff are allocated, can determine the academic focus for students, and can develop innovative solutions that enhance student learning.

In order to implement the vision and the objectives outlined for Project C^3, the 25 local business leaders, the superintendent, and the School Board joined together to form a Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is composed of 11 members: three from schools, five from business, and three from the community. The Steering Committee was charged with the responsibility of providing practitioners with the resources and guidance that they needed to produce high school graduates with the skills required in the workplace. They envisioned a three-stage process:

1. identifying specific workplace proficiencies;
2. documenting the use of these skills in the workplace contexts in which they are used; and
3. translating the findings from the first two process stages into changes in curriculum and pedagogical methods.

Identifying workplace proficiencies. The first step in the process of designing Project C^3 was to identify the skills and knowledge necessary for success in the workplace. The Steering Committee identified seven skills: reading, mathematics, writing, speaking and listening, computer literacy, reasoning and problem solving, and originality and creativity. For each of these seven skills, they also specified five levels of proficiency: rudimentary, basic, intermediate, adept, and advanced. A set of defining characteristics, or rubrics, was developed for each level of proficiency.

Documenting skills in the workplace. Next, the committee initiated a job analysis between January and November, 1990. More than 3,000 employees of over 300 Fort Worth businesses analyzed 791 jobs. Employees were asked to identify important tasks for their jobs, describe the subtasks required to complete each task, and rate the level of proficiency for each skills required to complete each task. Results of the job analysis indicated that:

- thirty percent of the jobs analyzed required some level of additional, postsecondary education beyond high school;
- higher levels of proficiency , i.e., adept and advanced, were not confined to jobs requiring postsecondary education: 46 percent of the jobs requiring only a high school education required at least an adept level of proficiency in at least one skill area; 34

percent of the jobs required the "adept" level of proficiency in more than one skill area;

- jobs that require higher levels of proficiency pay higher salaries; those who are employed in these jobs have lower rates of unemployment; and
- occupations that require a high level of proficiency in one skill area tend to require a high level of proficiency in other skill areas.

Translating findings. After identifying workplace proficiencies and documenting skills in the workplace, the district began to develop restructuring initiatives included in Project C^3. The superintendent formed a Project C^3 Development Group, and Work Teams. The Superintendent's Development Group serves as the core management and communications team for Project C^3 development efforts. It provides overall leadership for planning and general oversight of activities.

Work Teams provide the leadership for each project and consist of the project coordinator and teachers, administrators, and corporate and community partners. Six projects form the core components of Project C^3:

- Equity 2000 - mathematics, tutoring, and counseling;
- Mathematics - New Standards Project, and math with calculators project;
- Vocational Education - TechLab 2000;
- Vital Link - student internships, teacher internships, and the Portfolio Project;
- Communications - New Standards Project, Applied Learning, and Writing and Technical Schools; and
- School Based Decision Making (SBDM), and the JCPenney High Performance Schools.

Through this three-step process of determining key workplace skills, FWISD took the first step toward districtwide restructuring by identifying and validating a set of outcomes for the school system to target. The job analysis data suggested revisions for the district's curriculum so that teaching and learning more closely support the transfer of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to "real-world" settings. Project C^3 initiatives are directly related to the survey data and to the commitment to the school as the center of change.

While each of the six projects mentioned in the previous section are key components of Project C^3, in this section we will focus on three of these districtwide projects that directly effect parent, family, and community involvement. Then we will describe building level initiatives that specifically effect parent, family and community involvment in the middle grades.

Districtwide Initiatives. Districtwide initiatives include: Equity 2000, which is a national effort sponsored by the College Board to increase the number of economically disadvantaged and minority students who attend and succeed in college, and its related components that include Paving the Way, Saturday Academies, Mathematics Institutes, Guidance Institutes (Mathematics and Guidance Institutes are designed for middle grades school staff as they work with students and their parents/families), and Practical Parent Education; Vital Link, which provides for middle school student internships in local businesses; and School Based Decision Making (SBDM) which includes teachers, parents, and community members in roles as decisionmakers at the school level, and includes the High Performance Schools Project; and Parent Volunteer Coordinators, implemented through the district's Adopt-A-School office.

Most of the district staff that we interviewed mentioned a focus on corporate involvement in districtwide reform efforts. District staff recognized that parent involvement has increased as an outcome of the initiatives; however, parent/family involvement has not been a targeted area of restructuring efforts.

Equity 2000. Equity 2000 is a national effort to increase the number of economically disadvantaged and minority students who attend and succeed in college. The goals of Equity 2000 are:

- to improve academic preparation at the middle and high school levels by requiring college preparatory algebra and geometry courses for all students;
- to increase student motivation and raise student expectations by providing needed information on college preparation, application, and planning; and
- to disseminate results and encourage replication through research and evaluation, and a national advocacy campaign.

There are four primary components of the Equity 2000 program that are currently implemented in FWISD: Paving the Way, Saturday Academies, Mathematics Institutes, and Guidance Institutes.

Paving the Way focuses on assisting middle grade students in ultimately preparing for higher education by involving their parents/families in sound educational decisions about the wide range of options that are open to students throughout middle school, and as they enter high school . Each student entering sixth grade is given a folder entitled *Paving the Way . . . Middle School and Beyond*. When middle grades students leave middle school, they receive a similar folder that assists them in making educational decisions about high school (*Paving the Way. . .High School and Beyond*) that assists them in preparing for college. Contents of the folders include standardized test dates, course descriptions and requirements, steps to college handout, magnet school information, a high school planning guide for parents of students in grades 6-9, and a middle or high school directory. Contents are printed in both English and Spanish. Parents/family members are encouraged to talk with their children about the options available to them throughout middle school and high school. School staff are available to conference with parents/family members and students as they make these decisions.

Equity 2000 provides six Saturday Academies for tutoring students who score below 70 on report cards (letter grades are no longer used in Texas schools). The program is designed to assist students in developing better math skills and improving their attitudes about learning. Parents are also invited to attend sessions on better math skills and Family Math with their children. District staff reported that they have seen an increased interest on the part of parents in what their children are learning, especially as it relates to math.

The Mathematics Institute and the Guidance Institute are components of Equity 2000 that focus on professional development for teachers as they work with middle grades students and their parents/families. The Mathematics Institute includes a full-time, two week summer institute for eighth grade teachers in the district. The curriculum for the institute is based on the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics standards, and the Texas Essential Elements (Texas' learner standards, currently under revision). It provides strategies for teachers to use as they prepare stuents for success in college preparatory pre-algebra. The Guidance Institute provides training for guidance counselors in the FWISD. This is a one-week summer institute to update counseling skills and increase awareness of multicultural issues as the counselors work with middle grades students and their families.

Practical Parent Education was initially developed as a public relations tool to "spread the word", as one district administrator put it, about Equity 2000. In addition to this public relations function, the program was designed to be supportive to parents, and to get them involved. Practical Parent Education is administered through the district counseling office and has been for the past three years. The program builds on the experiences and expertise that parents bring to the table. The counselor serves as a support for the parents by working with them on an individual, as well as group, basis. District staff reported a wide range of topics for Practical Parent Education: academics, discipline, violence, drug abuse, and challenges to individual students and their families.

Vital Link. Vital Link was developed by the American Business Conference's Education Task Force and is based on the principle that students can be motivated to achieve in school if they understand the connection between what is learned in school and what is needed to be successful in further learning, in the workplace, and in the community. Fort Worth was selected as one of three sites nationwide to pilot the Vital Link initiative. Other sites include San Diego, California, and East Orange, New Jersey. Each program is unique and is designed to fit the needs of the community it serves. The FWISD program is the largest of the three, and has the most students involved.

In 1993, 2,325 students, 248 FWISD teachers, and 140 companies participated in the Vital Link program. During the spring of 1993, FWISD piloted the regular school program and 817 students from six schools participated in April and May 1993. There were 369 grade six students from the middle school summer school program who "shadowed" employees at participating businesses to learn about the workplace.

According to those we interviewed in the district, Vital Link provides a solid parent base of support. Parents know about the program and support its efforts. Students participate in Student Internship Programs where they experienced hands-on activities in all kinds of professions within the Fort Worth area. The project tries to emulate "the world of work" by having students complete an employment questionnaire and application.

In order to bring Vital Link back to the school to build on the experience, the district started Vital Link Clubs in every school. Students who have completed Vital Link have the opportunity to enrich each others' experiences. This way, the experience is not forgotten and the students remember the skills they will need in order to succeed in the workplace when making educational decisions.

In our interviews with the superintendent, he related two Vital Link "success" stories:

> A student participated in the summer program; he had failed the 6th grade, was not successful in remediation in summer school. He went into a business for an internship. The company spent time working with the class and talking about what skills were necessary for the jobs. After the kids left, the company did follow-up work with them. The student wrote: 'I learned that if you want to tell your boss something, you have to write a memo. You have to know something about language arts if you want to be somebody.'
>
> Another student fit a similar profile; she lives in the projects and her family has been on welfare for several generations. We put her in an internship out at JC Penney. She spent a day in security, a day in the stock room, a day on the floor, and one day with the buyer. I went out on Friday, and she had the keys to the store in her hand to let the people in. I asked how her week had been and she said, 'I'm going to work here when I get big.' I asked what she needed to take in school if she were going to have a job there. She said, 'Oh, math. Did you know that for every item shoplifted out of our store, we have to sell three items to make up for it? And the cash register; I have to make correct change. If I don't give correct change our company would shrink.'

Teachers also participate in Vital Link through the Teacher Institute Program. Almost 300 FWISD teachers participated in a Vital Link internship designed to provide them an opportunity to explore the work environment in order to gain a broader understanding of the connection between the school curriculum and what is needed for success in the workplace. District administrators report that this is one of the strategies used to relate the Vital Link program to classroom activities.

Outsiders constantly comment on district, business, and community support, and the number of students that the program serves. A district administrator told us this story:

> We continually hear great things about the program when we are out in the community. One day the Vital Link staff were at a local restaurant for lunch. The waitress noticed the Vital Link nametags and proceeded to tell about her niece's experience with the program. She said her niece was one of the first to go through the program. You could tell that the program had made an impact on the entire family.

ABC News came into the district for two days with a crew to do a segment on Vital Link. Our informants told us: "After the two days, they called back to New York and said 'this is the best thing since sliced bread.' More staff arrived and stayed all week long." As a result, the district got a full segment on the news. It showed students and businesses participating in the program and showed, as the superintendent put it, "that when a business comes to Fort Worth, they will be expected to be involved in the schools."

School Based Decision Making. SBDM was introduced into the FWISD during 1981-82. By fall 1984, SBDM was implemented to some degree in all FWISD schools. In 1991, SBDM became a priority for the FWISD. The purpose of SBDM is to improve student achievement. SBDM, as implemented in FWISD, is based upon three basic premises:

- those most closely affected by decisions ought to play a significant role in making those decisions;
- educational reform will be most effective and long-lasting when carried out by people who feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the process; and
- given the opportunity and support, people will willingly accept responsibility and accountability for their decisions.

SBDM in FWISD is a process for decentralizing decisions to improve the educational outcomes for students at every campus. The major outcomes of SBDM, as outlined by those we interviewed, are:

- improved student achievement as a result of effective district and campus planning;
- increased community involvement in the school improvement process;
- clearly established accountability parameters for student achievement;
- improved communication and information flow;
- consensus-based, participatory decisionmaking;
- pervasive long-term commitment to increasing the quality and level of SBDM;
- increased flexibility and accountability at the campus level in the allocation of human, fiscal, and other resources; and
- coordination of "regular" and special program components.

The SBDM team in each school includes a minimum of eight members and are required to be established annually. The team consists of: the principal; three teachers (elected by the faculty, with the election to be supervised by the Campus Coordinating Committee); three parents elected by the predominant parent group; and a community representative selected by the preceeding seven members. In addition individuals, as determined by the eight members, may be added so that all the school's major constituent groups are adequately represented (i.e., classroom teachers, parents, support personnel, community and/or business representatives, and/or students). Schools may choose to specify staggered terms for SBDM members in their by-laws. Those schools must provide for the election of at least one teacher and one parent each year. Schools may also choose to elect subcommittees to address specific issues in the school so that there is more broad representation of the population.

Many of the minority communities where the parents are not as well educated tend not to want to be on the SBDM teams. Efforts have been made to use Spanish speaking interpreters to include these underrepresented parents in the SBDM teams. One of the items written into the guidelines is for every school to strive to make sure they have adequate representation, especially by parents/family members across all the groups represented in the school.

The High Performance Schools Project is a joint venture of JCPenney, FWISD and the National Alliance of Business. JCPenney's support provides the incentives and assistance for schools to initiate restructuring through SBDM to improve teaching and learning. Goals of this program are to:

- increase the amount of quality learning for all students;
- motivate local educators and the broader community, including parents, to take an active part in school reform;
- build the internal capacity of schools to set student learning goals, determine how they will reach those goals, measure progress, and create incentives for those employees who meet student needs; and
- establish a model SBDM program that can be replicated within a district and by other school systems.

The district's SBDM task force has made several recommendations related to further training and support for SBDM members. Key elements of this training have been incorporated into the High Performance Schools Project. As a result of these recommendations, the professional development work group developed three full-day training sessions focusing on goal setting, curriculum budgeting, personnel allocation, and school organization. Out of 105 schools, 12 or 13 team members - including parents, family members, and community members - from each school attended as well as some of the central administrative staff.

Parent Volunteer Coordinators. In addition to coordinating school "adoptions" by local businesses, the Adopt-A-School office trains Parent Volunteer Coordinators for all schools in the district. The Adopt-A-School office provides a set of training materials and staff are on call to help recruit parent volunteers. Students in the district have put together a parent volunteer handbook that gives ideas for activities to do with the children. There is a parent volunteer advisory committee, some of whom are middle school parents, who help the office with outreach, and provide advice on volunteer recognition programs. The advisory committe is also involved in training Adopt-A-School volunteer coordinators, who in turn train parents on getting involved in their child's school and motivating other parents to become more involved.

Parent Volunteer Coordinators use varying strategies to involve parents and family members. On one middle school campus a health clinic provides an avenue for initial contact with parents/families. The school is located in an area of Fort Worth where parent and family involvement traditionally has not been strong. As parents/families come to the clinic for services, Parent Volunteer Coordinators talk to parents and family members about volunteer opportunities. Often parents/family members return to volunteer in classrooms as tutors and mentors, or to work in the office or lunchroom.

On another campus, "semi-contracts" have been developed with parents. When parents enroll their students in the school, they sign a contract that commits them to the equivalent of 30 hours of volunteer work . These 30 hours don't have to take place within the school, but can be for or with the school. For example, a parent/family member might volunteer to host a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meeting in their home. This allows parents/family members who do not have transportation to the school a more convenient and practical way to participate in PTA meetings.

At the end of the year, the district recognizes all the parent volunteer hours. In 1993, around 800-900 parents attended a brunch sponsored by the district where they were recognized by the superintendent. A book was published for this event that indicated their hours of service, and they received given a token of appreciation. Adopt-A-School staff report that the number of volunteers is consistently growing each year.

Building-level initiatives. In our site visits we found two middle grades building-level initiatives that focus on parent and family involvement. FWISD district personnel cite these two programs as exemplary of building-level initiatives, but acknowledge that "parent, family, and community involvement in the middle grades is still not where we want it to be...we have a long way to go."

Parent Universities. Parent Universities occur at the two alternative middle schools, Horizon and the Middle Level Learning Center. As part of the enrollment process in these schools a compact is developed between parents/families and the school. Parents agree to come to at least 3 or 4 Parent University sessions each semester, and also to come to a school/family conference at least once during the semester.

Parent University sessions focus, primarily, on academic success for students in an alternative program. A key component of the Parent University is the development of an individual growth plan for each student. Parents participate in developing the plan and agree to their responsibilities in implementing the plan, including monitoring student progress and homework activities. On average, there are 125 parents in the programs at each school; one teachers told us that "participation in the program usually begins small in the beginning of the year, but increases as the year goes on."

Because this program is year-round, and our second site visit to FWISD could not be conducted until the early summer of 1994, we were able to speak to parents whose children were in the program at Horizon Middle School. The parents with whom we spoke felt the program was effective "because of the small population of students and parents at the school and the ability to receive more individualized attention by administrators." They also said that they appreciate the opportunity "to be involved in such an active way in [their children's] learning."

Parents United with Teachers. The Parents United with Teachers (PUT) program is being implemented at one FWISD middle school site. In our interview with the principal, she spoke eloquently of the program that she has begun in her school. Although the following quotation is lengthy, it most accurately describes the PUT program and portrays her enthusiastic belief in the role of parent and family involvement in middle schools. We allow her to tell the story:

> One thing that pulls parents and community members into the school is our willingness to allow parents to become stakeholders in the educational process. In order for them to feel that way we've had to do lots of training; now, we're at the most sophisticated part of our training where we are bringing parents and teachers together to own what is actually happening in the school.
>
> Teachers are in the group with the parents...we are talking about the 'nitty-gritty' things: grades, suspension, our moving to a new paradigm of teaching. We're discussing these things because parents want to know why we're not doing things traditionally, the way they have been done in the past. We have to educate them that we are doing student-teacher interaction, thematic units, interdisciplinary training; that homework does not necessarily mean that the child is not going to be looking in the book for the answer... because that does not promote problem-solving. We've had to teach them what problem-solving is, and what kind of classroom structure is necessary to develop and promote problem-solving. Critical thinking, using technological materials, etc.
>
> Parents - like those in my school - most of them did not graduate from high school. Their children are in the 8th grade and they are only 28 years old. That means that they gave birth when they were 14, or sometimes 13; they were dropouts and have low self-esteem, they feel that they have limited access to the schools, and they feel like its a situation of 'us against them,' and we're here to do all of this 'educated stuff,' and they are excluded. When I came to the district 8 years ago, we had virtually no parent involvement. Allied Communities of Tarrant County 'hooked up' with me. That is a church-based community organization that works hard to empower the powerless; whether they need houses, access to the schools, street repairs, or whatever it is. They have worked closely with me for the last 6 years to empower parents to become involved in the school.
>
> At the beginning of this [the PUT] program, we planted some seeds, then parents became more involved. We started taking them to statewide meetings, and they started hearing some first-class speakers, started sitting in the same seminars that we did - with people like Howard Gardner, Henry Levin. Now we are trying to solidify the experiences by setting up our own modules in the school that deal with things that happen in this school. For example, data. When we send test scores home we explain what they mean; [when we send] report cards we explain what we are talking about. Parents ask how important discipline is in the classroom, and what do those "n's" [not satisfactory] mean? We ask ourselves, 'How can parents help to make the school run better? What can parents do when they come into the school?' And we ask parents, 'Are you willing to go through training in our building that will help to learn how to answer the phone, work with the librarian, monitor kids on campus?' We really have to train for those things to happen.
>
> We wrote a module that was submitted to the state so that we could get monies in order to pay the parents a small stipend - $10 - to meet once a week, from 4 p.m. until 6:30 p.m. We paid them so that they could get babysitters, but it empowered them. They have been very open and verbal about what is happening in the school; there are a lot of things that they didn't understand. For example, a parent went with me to the budget meeting last week. After the meeting she met with other parents and said: 'I was shocked at how little money [the principal] has to operate the school on. Parents, we need to do something.' There is a lot of misperception on the part of parents and community that we have a lot of money for school operations. Yesterday, they all committed to train one parent during the summer; we had 50 parents trained and if they do the training in the summer that means that we will come back in

the fall with 100 trained parents who at least know school rules and regulations, who at least know how important it is that we keep an atmosphere and climate that is conducive to learning, who at least know how important it is for kids to pass the state tests so that they can get a diploma. These are things that a lot of people take for granted; our parents just didn't know.

These are working parents: one goes to work at 9:00, but she's here at 7:00 in order to help. We've had a weak PTA for the past couple of years, but they met yesterday and decided that they were going to try to revitalize that group. We've taught them to do 'turn out.' We've taught them that you don't do 'turn out' by sending a flyer home with the kids. You may send a flyer, but you establish a telephone committee and you actually get commitment. When doing our training, we role play. We have a group called Parents Visiting Parents; we want them to talk as a parent to another parent to find out what ideas these parents may have about school operations to make the school better. They try to arrange a time when they can come to their home and complete a survey and talk informally. That's the kind of role playing that we do before the actual visit is made. Three years ago, we visited over 800 parents; the teachers teamed with parent volunteers. We went through this low socioeconomic, drug-ridden, gang-ridden neighborhood and visited. We do that every year now. That was an effort that we did with 25 parents and 25 teachers. We talk to lots of parents that walk the neighborhood on Saturdays, that want their community organizations - like the church which is one of the most stable and strongest organizations in a Black neighborhood - to be involved. We use the churches as a place for serving refreshments, as a place to debrief, and meetings in the neighborhood. I try to visit each of the churches at least once during the school year, but there are so many in this neighborhood. When they want me to speak, I'll go. When they want me to do things as a school person to promote things in the community, then I'll try to do that.

The school serves kids from outside the neighborhood. We have a pre-IB (International Baccalaureate) magnet program. Those parents are already turned on. All you have to do is to tell them that they should come, and they do. We don't have any problems with getting those parents involved. They know the importance of involvement. We have several pre-IB parents that are in the building much of the time.

Other parent that are involved are representative of the kids that we serve. That's why we have training: so that parents that come in can function in a group. Parents don't want to be in a group where they feel like everyone knows more than they do, and they're just sitting there. I keep talking about the training, but I think it's very, very important. We're dealing with value systems and sometimes a person that lives over there [indicating an apartment complex nearby] might not have the same value systems that I have. I'm Black and they're Black, but that doesn't make any difference; our value systems may be drastically different. Unless we can access that, then they are going to think that I feel that I'm better than they are, and they aren't going to fool with me either.

I use everything that I can get my hands on to run this school. If you want to reform - and I'm strictly for restructuring and reforming because I know that the old, traditional way doesn't work - parents, staff and teachers have to be retrained. I even need to be retrained. I attend and do a lot of workshops. My school is a mentor school, meaning that we were chosen by the state to model the middle level model. The Carnegie Initiative: that's interdisciplinary teams that create a positive learning environment for adolescents. I do a lot of workshops for the district. I have travel monies for that and I have money that I can send teachers to other districts to do workshops on middle level education. The Carnegie Initiative provides money for my staff training; they have trained 15 of us. We have worked with Sandra Kaplan from UCLA for 11 days this year. We received all of our state training in Austin. There are 4

> schools in Texas and 62 schools nationwide. Next year, Sandra is going to visit our campuses and we are going to make videos. We have selected three themes. The 6th grade theme is Change; the 7th grade theme is Relationships; the 8th grade is Conflict. We are going to connect those disciplines and those themes are going to run through everything that we do.
>
> I want you to know that I think it [parent, family, and community involvement] is the most important phase of a school's life and innovation right now. If that doesn't happen, then our schools are going to fall apart. Everyone is working, and many parents feel that school is a place you can send your kid for a few hours while they go and do something else; you don't have to "be involved" for them [the kids] to have 7 classes per day. What we are trying to get our parents and community to know is that unless they are stakeholders, they've got to have buy-in and make it work or our educational system is going to go down the drain. It's one of the most important things that I do right now.

Challenges

FWISD has faced a number of challenges to the implementation of restructuring initiatives in the district. They have dealt with challenges related to public image, collaborating with corporations, SBDM, and Vital Link. They have also faced challenges associated with involving parents at the middle school level including: parents going back to work when their child enters the middle grades, conservative parental views of education, lack of accessibility to the schools during the day for those parents who work, and a decrease in parent involvement at the schools where children are bussed to schools outside the neighborhood. Finally, with the retirement of the superintendent, the district is faced with challenges associated with a new adminstration.

When speaking to district staff, the barriers associated with public image and the relationship with the local press seemed to be of utmost importance. They told us that many of the challenges encountered during the implementation of the restructuring efforts was due to the lack of a sound public image. They felt that a lot of their efforts were undermined by continued 'bad press.' District staff feel like the reporters have their own agenda. "Sometimes they make the news rather than reporting the news", as one respondent put it, and "they[the media] show up for 'hot topics' at School Board meetings, but don't come to things like awards night and celebrations of district accomplishments." One district middle school administrator felt strongly enough about an edition of the paper that she kept it for a number of years:

> On the front page was a story about a drive-by shooting - some sort of gang activity. On the back page was a story about a group of students who had taken the initiative to clean up an area of graffiti; these were students from the same neighborhood - predominantly Hispanic.

> The gang violence, the antisocial behavior got a big splash, and the community service received little mention.

Challenges associated with the district's public image started in the very beginning when the school district was better known nationally for their restructuring efforts than locally. District staff reported that "the district had a very good reputation at the national level, but they didn't do the groundwork in the community." They felt that the district could have used strategies such as publicizing in the local newspaper or creating a newsletter, a speakers bureau, or frequenting the 'lunch circuit', i.e., luncheons sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, women's club, Junior League, and service organizations. The district conducted some parent focus groups which helped with publicizing Vital Link. Another strategy the district is currently implementing is structuring community meetings for exchange and dialogue between the district and the community. There are also plans to have an external consultant come in to the district to help with communication skills and public image.

Collaborating with the corporate world created some challenges for implementing reform initiatives. For example, when making decisions, schools tend to move very slowly. This slow pace caused frustration for many business leaders because they make decisions more rapidly. One community business leader told us:

> In education, they make a decision and then they say, wait a minute, I want to talk about this a little bit more. If you are not willing to work in the system, you will just bang your head on the wall. If you have to go see the superintendent three times about an issue, then that is what you do. Keep bugging him until you get a yes or a no, not a maybe.

The district also encountered challenges from corporations when first implementing Vital Link. They had problems persuading companies to allow 12 year olds to come into the businesses due to liability issues. The business community and FWISD overcame this challenge by agreeing that students participating in the program would receive parent/guardian permission, similar to a traditional field trip sign-off.

The challenges associated with SBDM were a lack of guidelines for SBDM operation and training for SBDM teams. In the beginning, district staff in charge of SBDM tried not to offer guidelines for how the teams should be set up, the roles of team members, etc. However, they found that this led to confusion and frustration. There were no absolute mandates so there were no guidelines. Without a clear delineation of responsibilities, school staff reported that they "didn't know where central administration stopped and the school started." There was a lack of follow through in training for school staff which led to a decline in the use of the practice. Because the composition of SBDM teams change continually, continuity in training is especially difficult.

At the completion of our case study in the summer of 1994, it was unclear what challenges might be associated with a new administration that was scheduled to begin in the late summer. Since that time, in conversations with district employees we have learned that many administrative changes have occured. For example, some top building-level administrators with long tenure in the district have been put on "special assignment" as assistant principals, and as many as 80 central office administrators have been deployed to schools to work on School Improvement Support Teams. It remains to be seen how these administrative changes might effect the implementation of Project C^3.

Support Systems

From our visits and interviews in FWISD it was obvious that Project C^3 was based on a solid foundation of research, both from within the district and externally. The program is supported by research commissioned by the College Board and published in *Changing the Odds: Factors Increasing Access to College*. FWISD has used internal research data from focus groups to refine both the reform initiative and its relationship with the community.

Although district budgets were not available to us during our visit, we found that initial support for Equity 2000 was provided by grants from the Ford Foundation, the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, the Amon G. Carter Foundation, the General Electric Foundation, the Meadows Foundation, and the Sid W. Richardson Foundation.

Personnel resources that serve as a support for the program include:

- a Chamber of Commerce staff member added to the district staff and funded partly by the FWISD, and partly by Burlington Northern; and
- the addition of staff members by the superintendent that could support and help the restructuring efforts succeed through their expertise and knowledge. An Associate Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction and a Director of Research and Development were added.

District staff that we interviewed consistently pointed to the superintendent as being the "guiding force" behind reform efforts in FWISD. Many of the staff indicated that he was "forward thinking," "innovative," and "seemed to know what the district needed to move forward with school reform."

The district used external consultants to help them with the many processes involved in the restructuring efforts, especially training efforts. For example, researchers from Johns Hopkins University helped develop the levels of proficiency for jobs. Community experts from Louisville, Kentucky, and from Fort Worth helped provide some leadership for the efforts.

Outcomes

Outcomes data from a study of school reform efforts, commissioned by FWISD and conducted by Pelavin Associates, found:

- From the 1990-1991 school year, eighth and ninth grade enrollment in Algebra I showed a substantial increase. The enrollment increased from 2,850 to 5,312. Furthermore, by the end of the ninth grade, more than 90% of all students have successfully completed Algebra I. Approximately 30% of the students made a "B" or better in the course.
- Since the inception of the Equity 2000 program, the number of African-Americans, Hispanics, and other ethnic groups enrolled in Algebra I at grades eight and nine grew from 1,710 in 1990 to 3,850 in 1993-1994, an increase of 125%. White student enrollment during that period grew at a rate of 34%.

Outcomes data from a district research and evaluation study found that:

- Students who participate in the Vital Link program have increased their attendance at school, and these student's scores on the state administered Texas Assessment of Academic Skills test have risen.

District personnel cited the following outcomes from the program:

- renewed interest of the community in schooling, in general, and FWISD, particularly;
- new roles for parents, family members, and community members as decision makers on SBDM teams;
- increased participation of middle grades parents/family members as their children participate in districtwide school reform initiatives

- replication of the program in Kansas City, Kansas; Annapolis, Maryland; Tampa, Florida; and Yucca Valley, California. Some districts in Texas are also replicating Vital Link including the Birdville ISD and the Northwest ISD.

Lessons

1. *Community members and businesses may serve as change agents in the restructuring process.*

   Restructuring may be initiated not only from schools/districts, but also from the community at large. In Fort Worth, the business community played a key role in the planning and development of the restructuring initiative.

2. *Leadership at the district level creates a safe, risk-free atmosphere where personnel are free to "experiment" with restructuring initiatives.*

   Personnel felt that the atmosphere in the district had allowed a freedom to be creative, and one where they would not be judged as failures if programs did not succeed. They were encouraged to "reinvent" new ways of involving parents/families and the community in the educational process.

3. *Responsibility for decision making requires training, both for parents/families and community members, and for school staff.*

   In Fort Worth's experience with site based decision making, they found that collaborative decision making was an unfamiliar process for all participants. This change in role and responsibility required training in collaborative decision making processes.

School Restructuring

Lamoni Middle School
Lamoni, Iowa

Primary Authors:
Barry Rutherford
Michael Livesay

Data Collection/Reduction:
Cari Swenson
Becky Anderson

Beck Middle School
Georgetown, South Carolina

Primary Authors:
Barry Rutherford
Michael Livesay

Data Collection/Reduction:
Cari Swenson

Shelburne Middle School
Shelburne, Vermont

Primary Authors:
Michael Livesay
Barry Rutherford

Data Collection/Reduction:
Cari Swenson

Lamoni Middle School
Lamoni, Iowa

Case Study

Restructuring in the Lamoni School District has been centered around the creation of the middle school itself. A strong team of teachers, staff, and leaders at the school implement principles that support progressive middle schools - including community involvement and partnerships with families in serving the needs of early adolescents. Ongoing implementation of the middle school concept, based on research and supported by an "empowering" school and district leadership, defines the character of the school.

Lamoni schools enjoy a long tradition of support and engagement from the local community. Parents and community members serve as reviewers of the curriculum, as resources for instructional activities, as collaborators in all aspects of students' development, and as targets for ongoing communication in conferences and informal contacts. School staff and community members believe that the small size of the community and the schools is a major contributor to their success.

Context

Statewide Reform Efforts. School reform initiatives in Iowa are only a general context for the activities at Lamoni Middle School. School improvement efforts include curriculum review and development and state mandated testing. Lamoni reports good student performance as measured by that assessment.

Recently the school district submitted a proposal to the New Iowa Schools Development Corporation, a foundation that provides financial support to schools that are undertaking reform efforts, to institute innovative instructional approaches in the middle grades. Because Lamoni's program was too small, the proposal was rejected; the district joined with others in the region to form a consortium and resubmitted the proposal which was subsequently funded.

Local environment. The Lamoni School District is small: enrollment is 425. Lamoni Middle School serves grades 6, 7, and 8, and enrolls approximately 110 students. The district serves one of the poorest rural areas of Iowa. The community of Lamoni, however, is unusual in the resources found there, including a small college and active churches, and in the range of individuals and groups found there, when compared to many other rural communities.

Although Lamoni is a small town of a few thousand persons, that figure includes several hundred students at Graceland College. The presence of this small but well-known college is the legacy of Lamoni's long involvement with the Reorganized Church of Latter Day Saints (RLDS). Earlier in the century, the RLDS located its world headquarters in Lamoni. It was moved to Independence, Missouri, several decades ago.

Graceland College plays an important role in school affairs in a number of dimensions. The college campus provides facilities for presentations and events organized by the school. Key staff in the district, including former superintendents and the current language arts teacher in the middle school, have come from - and sometimes go to - the college staff. The college staff serve occasionally as expert resources for the school. The college participates in development efforts that have benefit for the district; for example, the recent designation of Lamoni as a "node" for the emerging fiber-optic telecommunications channel in the southern part of the state. The education department at Graceland also sends students to the Lamoni School District as "fieldworkers" and student teachers.

Every informant with whom we spoke about Lamoni schools cites the small size of the community and the schools as a crucial factor in the involvement of parents and families, and in the perceived success of the school system. Parents and community members consistently maintain relationships and open communication channels with school staff outside of the school campus. Communication takes place at local stores, at church, at family gatherings, and frequently just by telephoning a teacher at home to discuss a child's progress. Middle school teachers are particularly active in telephoning parents and community members about children's progress, about perspectives on the middle school program, or to request participation in school-organized activities. The Lamoni schools have a very strong music program; student presentations are very well-attended, as are football games and other sporting events.

Community members express a strong support of learning and education, sometimes paralleling the way professional educators voice the same commitment. For example, one community member who had been active in school governance in a large urban area before coming to Lamoni pointed out that his children were able to play many roles and undertake more diverse learning experiences in Lamoni compared to their previous school.

District environment. The district currently is organized according to elementary, middle, and high school divisions. District staff demonstrate an openness to trying "progressive" educational ideas. In the elementary school, for example, whole language instruction has been adopted for many classes, and some classes are being organized into multi-age groups. These changes in instructional approach do not always have the support of all parents, but there appears to be an open and lively debate about the district program.

The superintendent at the time the middle school was created was a strong advocate of staff empowerment, school autonomy, and educational technology. His decisions during his tenure promoted all of these policies. This individual left to take an administrative role at Graceland College. Using an interim superintendent, the school board conducted an extensive search employing professional consultants. They were searching for an experienced administrator with "people skills" to improve communications with the community, and for someone who could anticipate "future trends." The current superintendent articulates a strong concern for "child-centered education."

Program

Planning and Design

The decision to move to a middle school organization was originally motivated by concerns about the social interactions between children in seventh and eighth grades and students in higher grades, since they all shared the facility and organization of the high school. Many parents felt that there should be a physical arrangement that separated the two groups to some degree.

The former superintendent, however, brings an additional perspective. Current class size had created a condition where there was a need for an additional teacher, but there were too few elementary students in the upcoming classes to justify a new position at the elementary school. A number of alternatives were explored including going ahead with hiring a new teacher, or restructuring the grade organization.

> Money was the initial cause for thinking about this and for looking at alternatives. Actually I was in favor of a departmentalized upper elementary structure, not the middle school as I have been accused of. But I tried hard not to tell teachers what to do.

The district attempted to identify various alternatives before bringing the issue of class size and its impact on school organization into widespread public debate. When the issue did arise, leaders chose not to emphasize the financial dimension of the decision.

A citizen's task force was formed to examine the alternatives. This group, assisted by school district staff, was composed of community members. Researchers also attended conferences and meetings to investigate middle grade organizational options, and sought out reports from other schools in the region that had either implemented a middle school structure or tried other options that the task force was considering. The task force reported at a community meeting during which a lively debate occurred. Some staff and community individuals had positioned themselves strongly against the middle school concept; they actively worked to influence others to their way of thinking. Similar "supporters" and "opponents" had formed groups around other alternatives. After a long meeting, however, there appeared to be general agreement on the course of action: restructure to a middle school.

Staff from the elementary school and the high school were identified to be the new middle school staff. Initially, some of these staff continued to share functions at the middle school and one of the other levels. Teachers researched the middle school approach by reading, contacting other professionals, and attending meetings and conferences. Although some of these staff were at first skeptical about the middle school idea, they all became inspired and committed to the idea as their investigation proceeded, and as a solid team identity quickly began to develop.

Within a year from the initial consideration of the middle school program, the school was begun. The elementary school and high school principals shared duties administering the new middle school; the district did not feel it could justify three principals in such as small school system. During the first year of implementation the school team reviewed the program and the various components they were enacting. This review included communication with and input from the families.

At the conclusion of the first year, the staff presented its analysis to the principal along with a number of requests to create the conditions they believed necessary for designing a successful middle school. These points addressed scheduling; avoiding as much as possible sharing middle school staff with other levels; identifing the need for a common planning time for the middle school staff; and hiring an on-site secretary who would function as a general coordinator and point of contact for the school. The superintendent and the principals agreed to comply with most of these requests, granted a great deal of autonomy to the faculty team and its new school secretary, and directed them to carry forward with plans for the middle school.

Although the decision to move to a middle school organization was originally motivated by concerns about the experience of children with the older high school students, and by fiscal problems, planning and design based on the "middle school philosophy" and instructional program became a central feature of school improvement once it was undertaken. This is due mainly to the empowerment of the middle school staff to determine and conduct the operations of the middle school according to their research and understanding of middle school curriculum and practice. That process has also been enabled by the support of parents and families for the changes in the structure and program. Parents, families, and community members were significantly involved in the decision to create the middle school, and a core aspect of the school is involvement of families and the community in a variety of roles directly related to the instructional program.

Initial Implementation

Important features of the organization of the school and its operations also took place over the period of the school's existence. The empowerment of the school's teachers to follow their own lead in determining and carrying out the middle school mission started early and continued throughout the tenure of the previous superintendent. The effectiveness of the school team is cited as unusual and a central reason for the successes of the period. The downside, cited by some informants, is the potential for conflicts between this autonomous group and the rest of the district and its leadership. The staff agree that all members of the team play somewhat different roles, all of which are important to the team function. A key team member who played a role in stimulating and initiating many of the program's elements left the school several years ago. Her departure seems to be one that the team is still adjusting to, but the group appears to be able to continue its implementation of middle school ideas and philosophy.

While two principals originally shared the duties at the middle school, the high school principal slowly became the more active in the middle school. This principal also allowed the school substantial autonomy, adopted a collaborative decision-making style with teaching teams, and supported the school secretary's operational administration of the school. Since the arrival of the new superintendent, the elementary school principal, who also is new to the district, has been given responsibility for the middle school.

Staff at the middle school believe that the presence of the school secretary, and the particular individual filling that role, was a crucial factor in school operations. The secretary also was integrated into the school staff team and participated to some degree in planning and scheduling the instructional program. She was a point of contact for parents and families and knew the students well. This position, however, was removed from the middle school a couple of years ago, and the staff now works through the elementary school principal's secretary, who is located in the elementary school building.

Initial implementation appears to have involved periodically trying out one or more elements of the middle school concept, then moving on to another strategy or element. Staff initially thought that T-A, or teacher-advisory groups, would be a key part of the program. They broke themselves into advisory groups that included the special education teacher and the counselor who was loaned part time from the high school. The counselor developed a sophisticated schedule and plan for the groups.

Eventually the T-A groups were abandoned because some teachers did not feel comfortable with these groups and saw them as a waste of time for personal development and discipline for Lamoni students. Other teachers felt that the absence of groups would be a weakness in their implementation of good middle school philosophy. However, the school staff enacted their commitment to team agreement and long-term negotiation over the course of the program. The advisory function continued informally through communications with families and sharing of perspectives about students. The topics and themes that had been presented in those groups were preserved, however, and evolved into mini-courses for the second year.

Mini-courses were offered for 4 or 5 years, but in turn yielded to new forms. These were one vehicle by which the staff addressed ongoing interest in interdisciplinary and project-based learning experiences. Some teachers eventually became disillusioned with the courses, feeling they provided too much "fun and games." From the point of view of the faculty, some courses did become too unstructured, although informants suggest that problems were due to a lack of careful planning for maximum instructional benefit. One problem may have been that these courses became too varied, covering everything from baking a cake to building an engine. Lack of staff to cover the schedule also was a problem that arose with the mini-courses; state requirements removed the availability of staff from the high school whom the middle school had used on a part-time basis.

Community people were heavily drawn upon to teach mini-courses. Teachers would meet and brainstorm about the community members who could be asked to teach. These included professionals, people with special interests, and also older people and many parents.

During the first year, interdisciplinary units were developed based on topics such as Australia and the election year. These units were of varying lengths. The superintendent warned the staff as they were planning that these were big, even though exciting, undertakings and that they were courting burn-out. The teachers remain positive about the quality and impact of these teaching units, however, and point to the best of them as being their most successful and enjoyable curricular projects.

After that year, a community-wide evaluation was conducted and it was discovered that some parents and family members were worried that not enough of the "basics" were being taught. As a result, changes were made to the curriculum to include the "fundamentals" and address parent and family concerns.

Over the years, the staff has tried a variety of assessment procedures. They give report cards every 4 1/2 weeks, with letter grades. They continue to experiment with alternative assessments such as keeping a journal. Performance evaluations are currently being considered but are not near implementation. One year they tried signed assignment books to encourage completion of homework, but found that both students and their parents complained about the time it took to complete the books. The small size of the faculty and of the community lends itself to multiple opportunities to discuss students not only with other teachers but also with the children's parents and family members.

Evaluations are done whenever the middle school faculty feels a need for feedback. Schoolwide evaluations of students were done when the interdisciplinary units were being given. Student evaluations occurred more frequently at the end of a mini-course.

Other components of the middle school program are directly aimed at parent and community involvement. A committee composed of community members and parents oversees Outdoor Day, where students, family members, and community members join the faculty at a nearby county park in the fall. Participants organize and present booths, talks, and workshops. Representatives from the Extension Service and other agencies attend and present. Although this particular event is considered part of the middle school program, "it is a common thing in Lamoni to involve parents and families and community" in as many events or activities as possible. In addition, much of the planning and organizing of activities in other school levels is done by committees of school and non-school members.

In the spring there is Field day, just before school is out for the summer. Team sports, organized by class and grade level, compete in track and field events in the afternoon. Parents are always integral to this event. As part of the initial middle school implementation, staff planned to eliminate competitive athletics at the school, but decided "that isn't very feasible in this community."

The full range of local businesses and community group representatives appear to get involved in LMS, Inc., a student-operated business. Parents have been highly supportive of this project that is organized every three years, so each student in middle school has one opportunity to participate. LMS, Inc. has been conducted twice and will continue in the future. In addition to the hands-on and project based learning afforded by the activity, it also is seen as a community involvement program, and indeed, as a way for students to ground themselves in the real world of their community. Students must conduct market research to determine their product lines, negotiate financing with the local bank and business supporters, seek technical assistance from community members, and successfully sell their products in local outlets and through direct, house-to-house marketing. In the final phase, students are excused from classes for two weeks while they devote full-time to owning and operating their business.

Parent and community input have had direct effects on the planning and performance of school activities. For many years, the school mascot was used in the title of a publication devoted to student writing, the "Demon Digest." At one point, writing and presentations were even delivered on local cable TV by students dressed in demon costumes. A concern by community members over the symbolism of the demon was voiced, however. The resulting debate over the fate of the school emblem was sufficiently intense to lead many students at all levels to stage a protest walkout from class. This event was planned well in advance and became, according to staff and parent informants, a real opportunity to discuss issues of civil disobedience, personal ethics, and civil and religious rights. A compromise eventually was reached whereby the emblem was maintained on campus but would not be widely displayed.

From the start of the middle school, and as part of a district-wide tradition, parent and community involvement has been solicited and maintained. Involving families in "task force kinds of activities" has been common, and maintaining communication is seen as important. In recent years, most parents were supportive of the introduction of instructional technology, including providing computers for each classroom; community members serve on the curriculum review committees started several years ago. Teachers have many informal contacts with parents and also organize parent-teacher conferences. In mini-courses and other activities, the school makes extensive use of community members, parents, and family members as resources for learning.

Initial implementation of the middle school concept emphasized instructional and curricular integration and innovation. The process has been less focused and less consistently innovative in structures and programs for personal development such as the teacher-advisory groups. Informants do not address this difference directly, but all note that the nature of school-parent communication in Lamoni is such that students receive the personal attention they need.

When there are problems or when children need more than the school or family can provide, resources such as mental health professionals are sought by school staff. At least one teacher sees the evolution of the middle school program as going back and forth between academic and child-centered activities. In the high school, the academic program is driven by subjects, in the elementary school the academic program focuses on the whole student learning. In the middle school, they're trying to mix the educational focus, and they debate the merits of both approaches.

Current Implementation

The major changes from the past are in the area of district and school leadership. The degree of staff autonomy at the middle school is an issue that appears to be in the process of renegotiation. The new superintendent was not present during the evolution of understanding about how the middle school concept is being implemented in Lamoni, and she brings her professional experience from outside the school system. As a result, communication and the establishment of common understandings seem to be important tasks for the district and the middle school at the current time. The schedule and responsibilities of the new elementary school principal in his own building are barriers to his quick assimilation into the middle school team, as may be the long-standing and daily relationships already established among the middle school staff.

The activities and events outlined earlier such as Outdoor Day or LMS, Inc. continue in operation. Currently, interdisciplinary learning is organized through the Explorations that are presented by all classes in the eighth period. Faculty worked last summer to plan these units as interdisciplinary units for all subject areas. Originally they planned to have the students pick the topics, but the staff felt that was going to be too hard to monitor and that they wouldn't have enough materials for a wide variety of topics. Instead, they picked several topics: nutrition for the eighth grade, geography for the seventh grade, and natural disasters for the sixth grade. They wrote objectives for these units.

An early problem they encountered was the fact that they had six groups of students and only five teachers. They also were getting bogged down in planning, so they sought input and review by gathering a parent group, picking a mixed set of parents and family members by grade, and including special education. Then they delivered the unit materials to the parents, asked for feedback, and scheduled a meeting. Parents/families reactions to the units were positive.

Although the faculty thought it would be difficult, they were able to group disciplines and pair math and science, and English and social studies into the interdisciplinary units. The Explorations have worked well for the seventh and eighth graders. Sixth grade was more unorganized because only one teacher was there, although the special education teacher assisted the classroom teacher. Seventh graders have consistently implemented their geography unit. Eighth graders implemented the nutrition unit sporadically. Sixth graders began the unit on natural disasters, completed the unit, and then moved on to preparing skits to perform for the other classes. Community members have come into the classes as part of the Explorations. Assignments can also require activities from the family, such as tracking diet over several days.

The school system sees a high degree of participation from all groups, but in different activities. Farming communities, for example, are very engaged in Future Farmers of America, 4H, and similar activities and events. Other groups may attend musical events by the orchestra/choral groups; others may attend sporting events.

Community involvement continues in its traditional forms, according to informants. The parents know the teachers, seeing them at grocery store, the golf course, or wherever. The students know that their parents and teachers talk to each other. Parent's know what's going on in the school. "Community involvement is a natural in this environment." Middle school staff continue to seek review and feedback from "parent advisory" groups.

Challenges

Current and former board members as well as district staff leaders agree on some of the ongoing problems of concern to Lamoni: finding and keeping highly qualified superintendents and principals, and maintaining adequate facilities with a small base of fiscal support, even though such support is generally provided very willingly by the community.

School and community informants identify many problems and barriers that arose over the years, many of which have been resolved or surmounted. A key element of concern is the lack of an on-site school operations coordinator who is integrated within the middle school teaching team. The problems associated with sharing and scheduling staff across different school levels or simply within the limits of the available staffing have arisen in different forms every school year.

Common planning time among the teachers was established early in middle school implementation, but last year was not available following changes in schedule and the use of the middle school building rooms. The impact of this was quickly identified, however, and a common planning period reestablished. Staff currently are evaluating whether other changes (in team composition, in using the Explorations program rather than whole school interdisciplinary projects, in new classroom arrangements, and in the relocation of the staff meeting area) have reduced the effectiveness of that time.

Teachers report that the middle school program has gone "up and down" over the years, and that the recent past has seen a "slump." Some observers speculate that they may simply have burned themselves out in the process of experimentation and change. Staff point to greater difficulties in maintaining daily contact and informal planning among themselves, lack of individual energy, and problems in communication, understanding, and recognition that are still in process with the new superintendent. They are uncertain about what directions they should take or will be supported to take. To an outsider, loss of a key original team member, changes in the facilities arrangement, and evolution of the degree of staff empowerment may also be factors.

It is notable that the problems and barriers currently confronted do not appear to have direct effects on parent and community involvement. Their potential for indirect effects may be greater. Even within the context of strong community involvement, informants from the school system and the community agree that the middle school implementation has had additional positive effects on communication and involvement of families.

Community support for the school system is not without its periodic conflicts. Several years ago the district requested approval of a bond to support the building of a new middle school that also would house other units of the middle and high school programs. The current building is very old, multi-storied with complex passageways, and was recently condemned by the fire marshall for further use as a school due to its high windows and narrow and angled stairways. The facility is also poorly designed to accommodate individuals with mobility impairments. The initial bond election failed, however, due to the limited fiscal base of support that can be derived from this poor region. As one informant put it, "We're the poorest county in the state of Iowa. Great things can be done here, but you have to do it differently. You have to be really efficient."

It may be highly meaningful that it was a school issue that provoked the open community conflict. The schools and their support are very important to all sectors of the community.

The degree of involvement in the school also may be such that a general plan of expenditures is not acceptable to the active members of the school community; more detailed analysis, and the opportunity to express opinions are required.

The nature of the community and the role of the schools were revealed by the community's reaction to the conflicts generated by the bond issue. Everyone in the school district and among the community groups appear to have been deeply pained and troubled by the confrontations that occurred, as well as by the outcome of no new facilities for staff and students. Immediate steps were taken to resolve problems and bring the community supporters of the schools back together by gaining passage of the bond on a second attempt. A community committee was established, initially of 25 - 30 members, that deliberately incorporated key representatives of all of the groups and parties to the previous debate over the bond. A large core of hard-working members researched issues and possibilities, drew on the assistance of consultants, and developed a detailed plan for a new facility that was publicly discussed and explicitly economical. Clear links were articulated between the survival of the school system and the survival of the region as a viable community where families will want to reside. Personal expressions of concern were made about the impact of the previous conflict on the health and well-being of the most involved participants. The first bond election began to be discussed in a more positive light. "It's not an unhealthy thing to lose a bond on the first go-round. It makes you go back and think about what you really want." After six months of work, the committee presented its new plan. "By the time all this was done, the package was already sold," and the second bond issue was passed.

Supports

Some of the support important for the particular course of middle school implementation and parent involvement in Lamoni have already been mentioned. They include the support of the district leadership; availability of training, research, and attendance at meetings; school staff resources; community support for new facilities; and support to search for additional sources of funding. The size of the Lamoni community as well as the school is often cited as a key element in creating the learning environment and promoting school-community interactions. Graceland College is an ongoing resource for advice, recruitment, and facilities.

State and regional education services are utilized by school staff and by community members directly. Special education teachers and counselors have a number of professional experts and programs available regionally for referral and coordination. Iowa State University provided classes for parents/families of middle school students who wanted to work on communication (parenting) skills. The classes took place in school district buildings and the participants were paid to attend. Researchers are coming back to do follow-up interviews. Two of the instructors for the classes were local people.

The structure and character of the school district appears to have been a supportive factor for the kinds of middle school experimentation that is seen in Lamoni. The school board, for example, has representatives from various groups in the community. One former staff member notes, "The school board was always diverse, probably because of the college. It has a nice mix in between the business community, college, and agricultural community."

Traditionally, Lamoni has endorsed additional levies and bonds proposed by the school system, even in times of economic difficulty or when surrounding communities have been reluctant. The community supports the school through its support of fiscal initiatives and what is perceived as a relatively high tax rate structure. Recently, changes in state regulations allowed local voters to dedicate additional funds from state and local taxes to the school, and they readily did so to allow improvements to the facility and to support appropriate instructional materials.

Direct and regular funding for parent and community involvement in the middle grades was established simply by the creation of a middle school with a regular budget. A review of that budget shows no direct line item for parent involvement.

Outcomes

As result of Lamoni's implementation of the middle school concept, parents, families, and community members became more directly involved in activities of the instructional program. Parents believe that the expansion of school focus to include more on the social and personal aspects of children in the middle grades, as well as the incorporation of "real-life" based projects and activities such as interdisciplinary units and LMS, Inc., helped enhance the value of school for them and their children, and helped in general preparation for high school. Students surveyed after they moved to high school seemed to feel that they were generally

Adult/Child Learning Activities

Natchez-Adams School District
Natchez, Mississippi

Primary Authors:
Beckie Anderson
Pat Seppanen

Data Collection/Reduction:
Pat Seppanen
Janet Brown
Beckie Anderson

Community School District 3
New York, New York

Primary Authors:
Shelley Billig
Barry Rutherford

Data Collection/Reduction:
Pat Seppanen
Janet Brown

Rochester Public Schools
Rochester, New York

Primary Author:
Beckie Anderson

Data Collection/Reduction:
Pat Seppanen
Janet Brown
Beckie Anderson

Natchez-Adams School District
Natchez, Mississippi

Case Study

Recognizing that teachers are an essential part of parent and family involvement in children's academic activities, the staff of the Natchez-Adams Parent Center focuses their efforts on identifying the population to be served and teacher interactions with parents. Teachers are encouraged "to move the chair around by the parent, to sit down and become their friend, to become their equal in this fight to help their child." These efforts have been successful: during the 1993-94 school year, over 2,000 parents were assisted in helping their children with academic skills. The number of parents and families served by the Center has increased in each of the seven years the center has been operating.

Context

Community. During our visits to Natchez we sought to learn about the larger school district and community environment as they related to the Parent Center. Natchez, with a population of 19, 460 (1990 census), is a small town in southwestern Mississippi located on the Mississippi River. Here the Mississippi River serves as the border between the state of Mississippi and the state of Louisiana. Natchez' economy, based primarily on manufacturing, has eroded in the last 5 to 10 years due to the closing of manufacturing facilities. The current economy is dependent on service industries that include tourism and gambling. The public schools are among the five top employers in the area. Other primary employers include International Paper, Fidelity Tire, Lady Luck Natchez (a river boat casino), and the Natchez Regional Medical Center.

Natchez has a rich antebellum history. Its history also includes racial and civil rights struggles. The current population of Natchez is almost equally White and African American (51% White, 49% African American).

District. The Chamber of Commerce reports the public school student population to be 60% African American and 40% White. School staff place the proportion of African American students at 70%. There are approximately 5,800 students enrolled in the public schools and 2,100 enrolled in five area private or parochial schools. District staff report that approximately 25% of the families are below the poverty level as compared to 20% of the families statewide, although the method of computing, and whether or not non-public school students were considered, were not specified. Approximately 69% of the public school students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch may represent only a portion of the total student population who would qualify since many students do not return eligibility forms. In the primary and elementary schools, approximately 75 to 80 percent of the students qualify; fewer high school students qualify because they do not turn in the forms. About 3,700 of the students receiving free or reduced-price lunch are eligible for Chapter 1 services.

In the past 10 years, the public schools have lost a large portion of the middle class students to private schools. According to school staff, this exodus of students may be due in part to court-ordered desegregation of the schools which first occurred in the late 1960's, and again in 1989, when a number of schools were closed under a court-ordered desegregation plan. The population that has remained in the public schools is characterized by school personnel as including "large concentrations of lower-achieving students whose families have multiple needs due to poverty." Student standardized test scores on the Stanford Achievement Test have declined over the past three years in a number of areas and tend to fall below the state averages. As a district, Natchez-Adams is rated as "deficient" in terms of compliance with both state education process and performance standards. Currently, approximately 78% of high school students graduate from the public schools; overall, 68% of the adult population have a high school diploma (1990 census).

Natchez-Adams School District has one high school (with approximately 1,500 students), one middle school (approximately 1,100 students in grades 7 and 8), two elementary schools (each with approximately 1,000 students serving grades 2 through 6), and two primary schools (each serving approximately 500 students in prekindergarten through grade 1). The court-ordered closing of schools in 1989 led to the Parent Center being moved from one of the elementary schools to the district office. Staff feel that the Parent Center's new location created a more district-wide identity resulting in more use by parents from all the district schools.

Staff repeatedly referred to the "reshuffling" that has occurred and a sense of "instability" that has resulted. There have been three superintendents in the past six years. Particularly after the consolidation of schools in 1989 as part of the court order, there was massive reassignment of staff. Each superintendent, however, has "made his mark" by reassigning staff.

Policy. The Chapter 1 program emphases parent and family involvement and serves to foster the development of activities to promote adult-child learning. The district's parent involvement policy is articulated in terms of Chapter 1:

> The Natchez Public Schools believe that parental involvement is vital to the success of a school system. In accordance with their belief, the district's Chapter 1 program will include:
>
> 1. Annual public meetings to be held at individual schools. All parents of eligible children will be invited. The purposes of these meetings are to discuss with parents the program and activities carried out with Chapter 1 funds, inform parents of their right to consult in the design and implementation of the project, solicit parents' input, and provide parents an opportunity to establish mechanisms for maintaining on-going communications.
>
> 2. Notification of parents that their child has been selected to participate in Chapter 1.
>
> 3. Scheduled conferences between individual parents and teachers to discuss student's progress.
>
> 4. Assistance to parents which will help promote the education of their children at home.

Participation in adult-child learning activities provided by the Parent Center is limited to parents whose children qualify for Chapter 1 services.

Program

Planning, Design, and Implementation

Initially the Parent Center focused on direct intervention to assist families with basic material needs. As the program evolved, the focus shifted to providing skills to meet basic needs of families and academic needs of students.

In 1987 the Chapter 1 staff set up a pull-out class model for "most at risk" Chapter 1 children. This service delivery model led the staff to think about ways that they could generate greater parent involvement. The staff provided clothing, shoes, and homework assistance for Chapter 1 students. Because a number of the parents had been incarcerated, the staff felt a need to do something to involve parents and give them support in helping their children.

Center staff attended a conference where a parent center model was presented; district staff decided to implement a Parent Center in Natchez. During the late 1980's no school districts in Mississippi were operating a parent center. The Parent Center opened in Natchez at Martin Elementary School in 1987; in the first year it served 150 families, primarily from the school's attendance area. The end of the decade was a period of economic downturn for the community; the center continued to assist families with basic and immediate needs.

Staff assisted the school personnel by helping to obtain signed permission slips from parents in order to administer diagnostic tests to children. As the program evolved the Parent Center Coordinator asked teachers two questions: "Who do we need to serve?" and "How can we best serve them?" The Coordinator developed workshops on parent/teacher conferencing and made them available as part of district staff development activities. Center staff recall that these workshops elicited "positive" responses from the teachers. Staff indicated that these workshops provided teachers with insight into the advantages of greater parent/family support.

According to the current Coordinator of the Parent Center:

> It took awhile. The program didn't take off immediately. The first year we basically made a lot of house calls. If a teacher could not get a parent in for a conference, they would call us and we would go out to the home. Whatever little kind of problem the teacher was having, we would try to assist them, but this was not really what we wanted to be doing. It wasn't really getting the parents involved. Also, we did not get a great deal of requests from the teachers. Looking back, I realize that we really learned on our own what to do to get parents involved. The former Coordinator of the Parent Center created a workshop for teachers regarding parent/teacher conferencing. All the teachers had to come for an hour workshop and received staff development credits for doing so. She reviewed our initial vision for the Parent Center and discussed the importance of the role teachers play in communicating with parents. She used overheads with cartoons to stress that when parents come in to the school, teachers should try not to be so "professional." Teachers should move out from behind their desks, drop any authoritative style, and try not to talk over the heads of parents. We had to go though it about three times before they really got on the band wagon with us.

The focus of the Parent Center gradually shifted to involving parents and family members with their child's education. The current Coordinator of the Parent Center recalls:

> We wanted to do more than just get parents in for conferences. We wanted to offer the parent a way for him or her to be able to interact with the child once he or she got home from school. I think that a lot of parents have seen their role as coming to school for a special program and then going home and that was the end of it. We wanted parents to become actively involved in the education of their child. We thought that if we taught parents how to work with the child at home, then we would be making some inroads into parent involvement rather than just the provision of support services to parents. So, after the first year, we refocused the work of the staff at the Parent Center to providing activities that parents could use at home with their children.

> Our mission became helping the parents to help their children. A teacher can tell a parent at a conference, 'Your child needs help on recognizing words with long vowel sounds.' Well, so what? It has been so long since the parent has been in school, he or she may not know what the vowel sounds are let alone having the materials at home to work with the child. So we designed the Parent Center so parents come to us and we sit down and teach them what they need to know and give them the materials to use at home.

When asked what influenced them most when planning the parent-child activities, the Parent Center staff and Coordinator of Chapter 1 cited their "love for children and seeing them struggle." From their own experiences, they had observed that parents really wanted to work with their children but did not always know what to do. Staff clearly articulated a vision of parent involvement that "went beyond coming to PTA meetings, making cupcakes, and serving as a volunteer in a classroom." Parent and family involvement, to these staff, must also involve working with parents so that they can be involved on a day-to-day basis in the learning process of their child. A key feature of the initial planning process, according to the Chapter 1 Coordinator, was finding staff who "really want to work with parents." Staff also bring a commitment to activity-based learning experiences that are engaging for both parents and for students.

Key Activities. When the Parent Center moved from the original elementary school location to the district office, a new Chapter 1 Coordinator was hired. The new Coordinator perceived that a key to the further development of the Parent Center was to build on the instructional system and continually receive referrals from teachers. Chapter 1 staff established a referral process for teachers to refer parents for Center services based on the instructional needs of their children. The plan involved developing a parent assistance form copied on green paper (referred to in the district as a "green sheet.") This "green sheet" is completed by a teacher during a parent conference and lists academic skills for which the child needs instructional assistance at home. Parents take these "green sheets" to the Parent Center and receive hands-on materials (games, manipulatives, work sheets, activity packets) that promote learning and/or reinforcement of the needed skill. The staff demonstrate to parents how to work with their child using these activities. After a family brings a "green sheet" to the Parent Center and receives activities to take home, the Center staff sends a dated "white form" letter to the referring teacher, indicating the name of the student whose family attended the Center. This same form is used to inform a teacher when a student's parent attends a Parent Center workshop or checks out a computer. This follow-up process allows teachers to know when referred families have not attended the Parent Center.

While most referrals come though the classroom teacher, staff from the Parent Center find that they now get referrals from the welfare department, the health department, and the local employment office. The staff of the Parent Center provide any family member who comes to the Parent Center with materials, but the parent is always referred back to the classroom teacher in order to make sure the activities are linked to what the child needs to succeed in the classroom. The Chapter 1 Coordinator and a Parent Center staff member said:

> One thing is that we never just give a parent a piece of information and say, 'Here is something that will help you help your child.' We sit down with the parent and we show him or her how to work with the materials, how to play the game, or how the pieces should be used. We model for the parent to be sure that this is something they can do comfortably with their child.
>
> At this point, friends bring friends, cousins bring cousins, and we have people who just walk in off the street and ask if we can help them.

Staff began building their inventory of activities in the Parent Center with the early grades and each year they have added resources for an additional grade. In the first year they thought they could offer resources for grades pre-kindergarten through eight. But the staff discovered that providing these resources was more work than they could cover. Now they advise visiting educators to start small and increase slowly. Occasionally a family will lose or damage an activity and they ask if they can pay for it. The Parent Center staff respond, "All I say is that if they have a game that their child has outgrown or if they see something at a garage sale, pick it up and bring it in to us."

When a teacher has been unsuccessful in contacting a parent, the teacher completes a "yellow sheet". When Parent Center staff receive a "yellow sheet", they make a home visit to the family to find out the why the parent has not contacted the teacher. Parent Center staff talked about leaving their card on the door of the house; family members generally call to find out what the staff member wanted. Staff then explain the services available and encourage the parent to contact the child's teacher.

Workshops. A variety of workshops are offered through the Parent Center. Workshops are held in the central office auditorium, at the individual school buildings, and in the recreation rooms of apartment complexes. The workshops may involve "make it and take it" activities with parents. According to the Parent Center staff, "We supply all the materials and show them how to make folder games and learning activities. Sometimes they make two and give one to the Parent Center." Workshop topics highlighted in brochures that describe the Parent Center include:

- Assertive Discipline for Parents
- Pride Parenting (drug prevention and attitude adjustment)
- Kindergarten Skills (things parents can do)
- First Grade Skills (things parents can do)
- Improve Your Child's Reading Skills
- The Single Parent (how to survive)
- Computer Workshops (for take home computers)
- Who Am I?
- Parenting Skills

Other workshops, billed as "how to" workshops include:

- Manage your Child for Good Behavior
- Control Your Child with Good Words
- Teach Your Child Word Meanings
- Help Your Child Learn by Looking and Listening
- Develop Your Child's Self-esteem
- Have Harmony at Home
- Expand Your Child's Math Ability
- Develop Values for Responsible Living
- Have Healthy Minds - Healthy Feelings
- Expand Your Child's Reading Ability

The school principals also give the Chapter 1 resource teacher suggestions for workshop topics. The Coordinator of the Parent Center periodically contacts the principals for ideas for workshops as well.

The design of the activities has evolved over the past few years in order to find ways to effectively reach and involve more families. For example, in describing how and why the staff from the Parent Center offer workshops at non-school locations, the Coordinator of Chapter 1 said:

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

> We started to make home visits when we found that some parents would just not come in to the school. We visited and talked with them and then sometimes they come into the school but we still could not get them in for a parenting workshop. So that is when we started taking some workshops to them. We went to the recreation rooms at the apartment complexes. We take the mobile van out in the summer and park it in front of the apartments and let children and parents work on the computers. We have mini-workshops and set it up so parents can check out materials on their 'home turf' rather than having to come down to the Parent Center.

A workshop that has been added more recently is for parents of children who will soon enter middle school. This orientation session was initially very well attended and has continued to be popular. It includes information on middle school academics, non-academic activities, adolescent development, and a school tour for both students and parents.

The Parent Center also added a PRIDE Parenting Drug Prevention training for its counselors and Chapter 1 Coordinators. A few years ago, the district purchased the preview tapes for the PRIDE workshops (parent-to-parent drug prevention workshop). In order to lay the groundwork, the district sponsored a community event at the civic center that involved over 2,000 participants. It featured Milton Creagh, a nationally known PRIDE workshop trainer. Using Chapter 1 funds and drug prevention funds, the Chapter 1 Coordinator indicated that these workshops focused on training school staff as facilitators.

Computer Check-out. The computer check-out program has also evolved over the past few years. Staff at the Parent Center recall that:

> The representative from the computer company may have given us the idea for using computers at home. We had been using computers in classrooms for a number of years. Then the company came up with the idea that we have computers that parents can take home. We started the program on a small scale. Initially there were about 20 Apple Computers. We leased them from the company. As the years went on we went to a lease/purchase contract so that now we own the equipment. At first we just leased them because we had no idea how it was going to work. It may have been that the guidelines changed and lease/purchase arrangements became possible. We immediately found that both the parents and the children love the computers. We prepare customized software enrichment packets for them. The packets include some games that reinforce what they have already learned.

Chapter 1 eligible students and their families may sign-up to check out a computer and software selected particularly for their needs. These computers and software are checked out for six-week periods. According to the Parent Center staff, "The word kind of spreads about the computer check-out program and parents are anxious to get on the waiting list for one. One family in a neighborhood gets a computer and the other children hear about it and start asking their parents to get on the list. This has been a real motivator for families with children in the middle grades."

Staff Characteristics/Roles. According to the Coordinator of Chapter 1, "The staff must be comfortable knocking on doors -- going from community agency to community agency, home to home, church to church, apartment complex to apartment complex -- wherever they need to go to reach parents."

The Parent Center is staffed by one full-time Coordinator and three part-time paraprofessionals. These staff have very defined roles in relation to supporting families becoming involved in parent-child activities through the Parent Center. They:

- provide introductory workshops on the Parent Center to new teachers;
- supply the Chapter 1 resource teachers with "green sheets," "yellow sheets," and other referral forms;
- conduct home visits (approx 2 per week) to a family member who has not responded to multiple requests for a conference by a teacher;
- add to the Parent Center's inventory of materials by (a) ordering materials for purchase, (b) receiving donations of materials, and (c) designing and constructing materials;
- select activities for parents and family members to use with their children based on the instructional needs specified on a child's green sheet;
- demonstrate to the family member how to use each activity with their child;
- check out materials and track the use of the Parent Center by families;
- send feedback to the teacher on what types of services parents/families receive from the center;
- hold computer workshops in the auditorium of the Central Office Building;
- check out computers and keep track of the growing waiting list (in excess of 100 families); and
- refer parents back to the classroom teacher for further information on the instructional needs of their child.

A Chapter 1 resource teacher is based in each primary or elementary school and the middle school. Responsibilities related to supporting and promoting adult-child learning activities include:

- serving as a link between the teachers/parents associated with a school building and the Parent Center;
- supporting classroom teachers with green referral sheets and Chapter 1 resources;
- developing and providing workshops at the school on various topics for parents; and
- developing and providing materials for parents to use with their children at home.

Teachers are responsible for:

- contacting parents for conferences;
- determining the instructional skills that the child needs to work on to be more successful in school;
- listing the key skills that a child needs on a green sheet and giving it to the parent;
- requesting (using a "yellow sheet") that a staff from the Parent Center conduct a home visit with parents or family members who do not come in for a conference after repeated attempt to contact them.

Responsibilities planned for parents include:

- attending conferences with teachers;
- attending Chapter 1 workshops at their school;
- visiting the Parent Center to obtain and/or return activity packets and worksheets for skill reinforcement that are based on the learning needs of their child;
- signing up to request a computer and software for use at home;
- attending computer workshops;
- working at home with their child to support instructional needs identified by the classroom teacher; and
- using the activity packet or computer with their child at home.

Design and operation of the Parent Center. The Parent Center is open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, on a year-round basis. After-hours services are provided, upon request, to accommodate the needs of parents. Parents can enter through a outer door on the ground floor of the central office that is approximately 10 yards from the Parent Center.

Staff have carefully thought out the design of the Center. They noted that the room (formerly used as a classroom) had a large waist high shelving unit cutting across the middle of the room. They found that parents did not walk around this barrier but stood behind it like a counter where they were placing an order. The Parent Center Staff moved it to cut along the central length of the room where they feel it is less obtrusive. The Center is organized to store and easily retrieve large amounts of materials - generally arranged by grade level. As parents enter the center there is a couch and a round table for their use. A toddler table nearby holds activities for young children. This layout creates an inviting feeling for families.

Challenges

The primary challenges to the functioning of the Parent Center have been due to Chapter 1 guidelines, changes in middle school, and breakdowns in the referral process. At this point, staff from the Parent Center are working on the middle school issues and have been able to address breakdowns in the referral process.

According to the Coordinator of the Parent Center:

> One drawback to having only Chapter 1 funds is that we don't serve all children in the district. No matter what a student's test scores on standardized tests, they all have some weaknesses and could use some help. Sometimes all parents would like a little help. We have to rely on the individual schools to help non-Chapter 1 families.

Usually Center staff do not have a problem determining if a child is eligible for Chapter 1 and can use the services of the Center. If a parent has a "green sheet," the staff know the child is in Chapter 1. The parents who walk in without a "green sheet" sometimes are not eligible to use the Center. When necessary, Center staff refer to a list of all the Chapter 1 children in the district. If the family is not eligible to use the services, staff provide information on how the parents can help their child, but do not check out materials to them.

Principals and teachers from the primary and elementary schools refer families to the Parent Center much more frequently than do staff from the middle school. Generally, staff see a lot more parent involvement in the primary schools (PreK to 1). According to staff from the Parent Center:

> Parents [of younger children] are involved more as volunteers [in the classroom]. When children first start school, parents are really concerned that they get off on the right track. As they get older, for some reason, parents start to think that children can do it on their own. We will see the

> parents of the older children at the Parent Center if the teacher puts a real effort into getting those parents in for conferences and they say, 'This is something that you need to do because your child needs it.' We can tell when conferences are held because then we see the parents afterwards.

When asked to describe how they are involved with families and the role of parents, the middle school principals talked about the PTA and it's role in fund-raising, the Science Fair, and their involvement with parents of children who are having serious difficulty in school -- typically involving conduct. The principals of the primary and elementary schools, in contrast, have clear expectations that teachers will initiate contact with parents and refer them to the Parent Center using a "green sheet" if the child is having difficulty with his/her school work.

Parent Center staff have had to work with the teachers on how to use the "green sheets" in referring a family to the Parent Center. Initially teachers filled up both sides of the page with a list of skills from the skills card for the entire year. The staff at the Parent Center held inservice training for teachers to identify immediate skills that could be realistically supported through one or two visits to the Parent Center. Teachers began to write short term instructional goals that could be accomplished in a six week period. Some also enclose a "green sheet" with the report cards at the end of the marking period.

Supports

There are a number of significant supports which have led to the success of the Parent Center. These range from leadership and staff characteristics to links with other community agencies and resources.

Leadership. The Chapter 1 Coordinator has played a key role in shaping the focus and activities of the Parent Center. The Coordinator was responsible for the shift in focus that occurred initially when the Center moved from providing more informal support to parents (e.g., providing a "clothes closet") to providing instructional-related activities/resources that parents could use with their children to support the regular instructional program. She has continued her day-to-day involvement with the Parent Center and other parent services, having daily contact with the staff.

The school principal also appears to play a key role in supporting the classroom teachers in referring parents to the Parent Center. The elementary school principals, in particular, have included referral to the Parent Center as a resource that teachers must use if (1) the child is not getting a passing grade in a particular subject, or (2) he/she has tried unsuccessfully to contact parents.

Staff characteristics. Respondents (particularly the Chapter 1 Coordinator and Coordinator of the Parent Center) stressed the importance of the staff employed in the Parent Center. According to the Chapter 1 Coordinator:

> Staff have to be very knowledgeable of child development. One minute they may have a parent of a preschool-age child and the next minute they have a parent of an eighth grader. Staff have to know about the school curriculum and how the various subjects and skills are being taught. If we don't have an activity to teach a particular skill, staff have to be able to make something that the parent can use. Staff must also serve as the liaison to other agencies in the community, so they do need a social work perspective. We tell other districts that want to start a Parent Center that you do need this social work experience, but first of all you need an educator who understands curriculum. Staff must understand the skills that children need and at what grade-level they are taught.
>
> We knew that we had to find staff who were ready to go in and work with these parents. The staff are concerned, sensitive, and caring toward parents. When we started, we'd meet every day to focus our work, what we could do this afternoon, what we could do new, or what we could try to get parents to come in. Every six weeks, we'd come up with something new or different so parents would want to come back and see us.

Each of the staff who work in the Parent Center have specific skills that are needed to work with families. The Coordinator of the Parent Center has worked in the district for a number of years as a teacher and is committed to a developmental approach that stresses activity-based or "hands-on" learning activities. Another staff person also works with parents as part of Even Start. The other three paraprofessionals develop play-oriented activities for families and find new ways to teach the concepts and skills that the teachers have identified on the "green sheets". The staff described their different interests and strengths:

> Mine is more on family oriented activities in an after-school setting. We like to show parents another aspect of where they can be involved with the child's life.
>
> Mine is probably workshops with parents and things to do with their children and how to deal with their children. I think that I focus more on the younger children. I like doing the workshops with them and making hands-on activities for families. I always think in terms of what I can make to put into their hands. All of us are always looking though magazines and thinking about what we can use in the Center. We are constantly talking about different things to do.

Attitudes of children and parents: We heard from the children in focus groups that "parents need to tell me that I can do it. They help with homework. They make me keep going. They help me study. " Children also indicated that they think that parents talk to teachers to "find out how they are doing in school. They talk to teachers when something is going wrong." One child indicated that her teacher tells her mother what she needs to work on so they can go to the Center.

Attitudes of school staff: The Chapter 1 Coordinator recalls that when the Parent Center was first established staff would say, "These parents don't really seem to care. These parents are not involved." As staff have actually started to make contact with parents, more and more have come to say that "they have yet to find a parent who is not concerned about their child. But, a lot of parents do not know what to do or how to do it. They may be intimidated by the school." According to the Chapter 1 Coordinator, "We need to show them our concern and that we want to work with them to demonstrate their importance as their child's first teacher."

Administrative procedures: The parent-child activities are supported with a very well-established set of procedures and expectations. All staff have a common understanding of the terms used to describe particular procedures. For example, teachers refer a family to the Parent Center by filling out a "green sheet." The "green sheet" asks the teacher to specify the specific skills that the child needs to work on. Staff at the Parent Center attach a "buff sheet" to the "green sheet" in order to record the types of materials that a parent checks out. Teachers use a "yellow sheet" to request that a staff person from the Parent Center conduct a home visit to a family. Staff from the Parent Center send teachers a "white form letter" that indicates when a parent attends the Parent Center.

The elementary school principals articulated very clear expectations for teachers regarding the use of these procedures with parents -- that teachers are responsible for referring parents to the Parent Center if a child is not doing well (i.e., getting a poor grade) in the regular instructional program. This expectation ties the parent-child activities to the classroom instructional success of a child. In contrast, the middle school principals talked in terms of referring parents on an "informal basis." They indicated that they may suggest to a parent that he/she go over to the Parent Center as part of a parent conference (when the child is having some difficulty in school). At this point the materials at the Parent Center for fifth grade students and older are limited. The staff are working hard to develop these materials.

Use of research: When asked about what influenced the development and implementation of parent-child learning activities, staff did not cite particular findings from the research literature. We repeatedly heard staff refer to two belief systems (that do have a basis in the research literature) when describing why the Parent Center functions as it does. First, staff emphasized a developmental approach. Key staff (the Chapter 1 Coordinator, the Parent Center Coordinator, and the elementary principals) have background in Montessori and there are elements of this approach evident in the PreK-1 classrooms. Second, staff emphasized the importance of activity-based learning; learning through games and manipulative activities. The emphasis is on how children can learn successfully; then, it becomes a matter of providing resources and support to parents so they can work with their own children. Staff focus on what parents can do with their own children. No one cited research to support the belief that parent involvement enhances the success of children in school.

Staff development: Staff from the Parent Center do attend workshops and training institutes outside the district. These staff development activities are primarily offered through the state Department of Education. However, it appears that the development of the Parent Center model is far ahead of what is going on in other parts of Mississippi or in neighboring states. Thus, the staff appear to be leaders in the area; they have developed their approach through trial-and-error. Staff seemed to be constantly reflecting on what has worked and what hasn't. Changes for improvement are made as needed. Staff have been challenged to find activity-based materials and to develop packets for parents to use. The need to develop these materials has fostered or reinforced a creative spirit in the staff. They seem willing to try new approaches.

The Chapter 1 Coordinator is usually the sole staff member that receives funds to attend state-sponsored meetings. However, the Coordinator indicated that the Center staff typically attend these meetings. As the Coordinator described it, "When we arrive, everyone laughs and says, 'Here comes the Natchez entourage.' The staff go to the breakout sessions to get new ideas and I send them to other programs, but there have not been a lot of other programs to visit."

Staff from the Parent Center provide staff inservice for teachers in the implementation of Parent Center procedures and other topics related to relations with families (i.e., conferencing). This inservice was initially necessary to get teachers to communicate more effectively with parents and to specify skills that a child needed to work on.

Classroom structures. The Parent Center is closely linked to the classroom instructional program. The Chapter 1 program emphasizes support to the classroom teacher rather than a pull-out model; thus, the Parent Center sees its role as supporting the child in the classroom program. According to the Coordinator of the Parent Center:

> Because Chapter 1 has always operated so closely with the regular program, there has never really been a separate program. We have always worked together. So when we started the Parent Center we knew what was being done in the regular program. . . . We coordinate rather than going our separate directions. We don't want to confuse the child.

When the Parent Center was first established, the staff went to the teachers and asked for any instructional materials that they were not using or for extra copies of duplicated materials. The Coordinator of the Parent Center at the time (she has since moved to another role in the district) had been the Elementary Coordinator, so that she knew the resources that were available. She also knew the school curriculum.

Support services. As part of Chapter 1, the school district also offers adult basic education services for parents. These services include GED classes, reading classes, and an Even Start program. According to the Chapter 1 Coordinator:

> In recent years we have gotten more into the literacy skills of parents. We had started with a focus on having parents help their children. We realized that we had a problem when a mother came in and got her materials, started toward the door to leave, and them came back and whispered, 'I need something in reading.' We said, 'we just gave you something.' She then said, 'Yes, but I want something for myself because I can't read.' She was the first person who had openly admitted to us that she had a problem. We really had nothing at the time to help her so we referred her to the senior citizen complex because they had one-to-one tutoring. She later came back and read for us and was very grateful. But, after that, we decided to put a computer lab upstairs that starts at the first grade-level and covers GED preparation and even college-level work. After we started using the lab to help parents, we received an Even Start grant. We are also getting some staff help from the junior college.

As part of the Parent Center program, workshops are offered to parents and their children that focus on drug use prevention. The Chapter 1 staff initiated contact with area lawyers, the sheriff's department, and youth court to let them know these workshops were available. After attending the initial community-wide rally, the youth court judge decided that it might be beneficial for all families with children who get into trouble to go through the workshops. He sends the Parent Center a list each week and the staff set up the workshops. The children work with a guidance counselor who has been trained on the use of the materials (called the PRIDE workshop) and another facilitator works with the parents. Usually there are five or six in a group. They meet for a total of eight hours (four two-hour sessions).

Links to other agencies in the community. The Parent Center also provides referral and support services in other non-educational areas: medical assistance (arranging doctor visits and prescription glasses); referral to psychological services, the welfare department, mental health department, and parent support groups; referral to a clothes closet (clothes are donated by the community); and a shoe fund (money donated by local organizations and area churches). According to the Chapter 1 Coordinator, "We went to visit the other agencies in the community one at a time. We told them that if they have parents who come to them and need help, here are the kinds of services that we can offer. We asked to meet with the agency staff to explain what we do."

Resources. All funding for the Parent Center and parent-child activities is through Chapter 1, both the basic Chapter 1 grant and an Even Start grant. Parent and community involvement activities are a separate line item in the larger Chapter 1 budget. During 1993-94 an estimated $100,000 was budgeted for parent and community involvement. Over the past three years, funding has increased for parent and community involvement by an estimated 20 %. Overall, funds used for parent and community involvement are allocated as follows:

Salaries and benefits	60 %
Materials and supplies	20 %
Computer check-out program	20 %

The Parent Center is housed at the district central office. The following types of in-kind resources were received from other agencies and groups in the community:

- Youth Court provides assistance with the PRIDE workshops.
- Housing Authority allows the use of recreation rooms for workshops with parents.
- Area church groups provide donations of clothing, shoes, and food for families.

Outcomes

To date, there has not been a systematic evaluation of the impact of the Parent Center activities. According to the Chapter 1 Coordinator:

> Program evaluation is probably one of our weaknesses so far. We have examined our growth in terms of the numbers of people who have become involved and the number of families who we have served [over 2,000 were served in 1993-94].
>
> We have tried a number of evaluation strategies informally, but have not compared participants to non-participant or some other standard. For example, we looked at the grades of children whose families have used the Parent Center. We looked at the test scores of the children.
>
> We routinely do surveys of parents and teachers regarding the Parent Center. The focus is on getting their feedback on things that have worked, things they would like to see changed, and additional needs that they see.

In interviews, respondents articulated a number of desired outcomes for parents, children, and school staff. In some instances, staff offered a story about a particular family to illustrate the outcome.

The Chapter 1 Coordinator offered this story about a family:

> We have a parent who was coming whose husband left and took everything in the house except two mattresses and a washing machine. He left her with the children, with no income or nothing else. Of course she went on welfare; her case worker then referred her to us. She told us that last year she could not help her child with math so she failed math; she could not help her with long division. She said that her husband hit her and kicked her because she was so dumb that she could not help her child.
>
> When she started coming she received activities for her child and she learned how to do them with her. This mother said to us, 'I'm still poor and I still don't have anything. But, I do have hope. I can come to this Center and know that people will respect me as a human being and think that I am worth something. No one will ever again tell me that I am dumb or ever hit me again.' So this experience helps parents work with their children and helps them build their self esteem and personal worth.

Another staff person from the Parent Center offered this story:

> We had a teacher not long ago that gave a letter to a parent that said that since the family had started coming to the Parent Center, the teacher had seen a big difference in the academic progress of the child. The child was now receiving all As and Bs. The only area that child needed additional help in was English. The parent came to the Parent Center immediately and said, 'I've got to have English. I've helped him in the other areas.' Both the child and the parent felt good that the teacher had written this letter. What the parent was able to do each night with the child had helped to raise his grades. So, they immediately wanted materials related to English; the child wanted his mother to come back to the Parent Center to get these materials. In a sense, when the parent comes to the Center, the child knows that she cares enough to get something for him.

111

Outcomes that were most frequently articulated for parents include:

- Having additional materials to work with their children;
- Finding out that school staff really care about them and their children;
- Being comfortable communicating with the school;
- Helping their children with homework;
- Setting-up a designated space for children to study at home;
- Encouraging learning in the home;
- Knowing where to find help for themselves and their children;
- Improving skills related to parenting (discipline, communication)
- Attaining literacy skills; and
- Increasing self-esteem;

Parents, teachers, and Center staff mentioned these outcomes for children:

- Increasing self-esteem;
- Improving academic progress.

Teachers most frequently articulated these outcomes in relation to their work:

- Feeling that there are resources in the district for them to draw on to help parents help their children;
- Engaging in behaviors that help connect parents to resources, including referring parents to the Parent Center;
- Having the attitude that parents do want to help their children succeed in school.

District outcomes articulated by district staff:

- Changing attitudes about the school district.

Lessons

1. *Programs evolve over time; original program purposes and goals may be modified or replaced when new or more important needs arise.*

   Linking parents and families to agencies that provide basic family needs was the original purpose of the Parent Center. Over time, parents began to request help with home activities geared toward improving student academic success.

2. *Staff development is a key component of adult/child learning activities.*

Consistent, on-going staff development provides program staff with the tools and strategies necessary to effectively involve parents/families in learning activities at home with their children.

3. *Successful adult/child learning programs provide parents and family members with the necessary knowledge and skills that enable them to work directly with their children on instructional tasks.*

   Program staff provide both training and materials to parents that increase the capacity of parents to work with their children at home on instructional tasks.

4. *Successful adult/child learning activities are closely linked to the classroom instructional program.*

   Center staff and teachers remain in constant contact, through the use of the referral process, to link home learning activities with the instructional needs of the child and the objectives set by teachers.

5. *Activities and practices may need to change as students and families mature and enter the middle grades.*

   Resource needs may change as children and families mature. The middle school students have not used the Parent Center for checking out skill building packets as much as the elementary students. However, the demand for computers to be checked out through the Parent Center has been a high demand for older students, possibly because computers are a better match developmentally for older student's learning.

Community School District 3
New York City, New York

Case Study

Community School District 3 in New York City represents formidable challenges: students are racially and ethnically diverse, and many come from impoverished backgrounds. Prior to school reform initiatives low student achievement, violence, economic problems, and high student and faculty mobility were the norm rather than the exception. Yet this district is becoming a vibrant center of learning with strong academic and parent leadership, multiple opportunities for parents and children to participate in district programs, strong parent advocacy for the schools, and increased student achievement. While parent, family, and community involvement is not solely responsible, it is a part of a systemic reform effort that linked schools, parents, neighborhood, social service agencies, and cultural resources in such a way as to make a difference in the opportunities of district families.

Context

Community School District 3. Community School District 3 extends from Central Park to the Hudson River, and from just below Lincoln Center to just above Columbia University. The district has 18 elementary schools, three middle schools, and a high school. The student population of Community School District 3 is 45% Hispanic; 40% Black; and 15% White, Asian and other. The superintendent describes the district as a "marvelous mosaic" of children, schools, and programs where "young minds and gifted teachers in pursuit of excellence inspire each other to celebrate their differences".

In 1988 Community School District personnel were given the opportunity to "reinvent middle school education," as one of our respondents told us. The district planned and implemented a middle school program to replace the two junior high schools that at that time existed in the district. Both of these schools were physically and socially "at risk". They were riddled with violence, unsafe, and unkempt. Parents/families and the school administration wanted to pursue a clean break from the past.

The district held a competition to design middle grades programs that would be new and different from the practices that existed prior to 1988, and according to our informants, the purpose of the competition was "to make the district the best that it could be." The competition was held between middle grades educators (both teachers and administrators). The winners of the competition were given positions as principals in the schools. In addition to the three new middle schools, multiple alternative middle schools were also designed. The principals of these new schools were given the opportunity to choose their teaching staff; the staff then designed their own curricula and instructional delivery systems.

Many of the middle school magnet programs and alternative schools, often called "mini-schools" within the district, are housed in elementary schools or in the middle schools. Each of the three main middle schools and the "mini-schools" has special programs and schools-within-a-school. All of the schools have bilingual education, a constructivist approach to teaching and learning, a supportive environment that encourages independent thinking, and an emphasis on using community resources. In addition, each school has distinctive features and each takes a somewhat different approach to curriculum and instruction. Crossroads Middle School operates as part of Ted Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools, and emphasizes writing. Booker T. Washington Middle School has five mini-schools and opportunities for children to take part in the Global Academy in which culture, geography, and languages of 20 countries are studied. Joan of Arc Middle School features interdisciplinary teams of teachers who are responsible for all instructional and organizational decisions involving students at each grade level, and an approach that centers on a curriculum that stresses student effort and empowerment.

It should be noted that each of these schools is a school of choice. Parents and fifth grade children learn about the programs, and others within the district through a School Fair, and through brochures that are either mailed, or sent home with the students. Students and parents complete an application for their top three schools of choice. District personnel told us that in most instances the district can accommodate one of these choices.

District 3 has a Parent Involvement Program (PIP) office to coordinate activities. The Program Director, who has retired since our site visit during the 1993-94 school year, is a charismatic leader. She had been very successful in organizing and involving nearly 3,000 parents in another district prior to coming to Community School District 3. The Director was given an office and a staff of three to coordinate all district parent involvement initiatives and programs. Each staff member works with paid staff located within each school to understand the needs of parents and families in the school and to implement programs to meet their needs.

For the researchers conducting this study, Community School District 3 represents a unique set of challenges. During our site selection process, we identified Community School District 3 as a candidate for two research focus areas: districtwide parent and community involvement, and adult/child learning activities. Because we had three other strong sites for the districtwide research focus strand, it was decided that Community School District 3 had an institutionalized program of adult/child learning experiences worth exploration. While we endeavor to describe the adult/child learning program in as much detail as possible, we caution here that the activities we found are but a small part of the larger scope of parent, family, and community involvement programs conducted within the district.

District Policy Environment. At the district and school level, parent involvement is viewed as integral to the schooling process. In 1993 the New York City Board of Education issued a policy statement on parent and family involvement, called "The Blue Book," that delineates the minimum rights and responsibilities of Parent Associations. Parent Associations are the vehicle used throughout New York City to involve parents and families in the education process. The policy states:

> Parent associations are the backbone of the public schools. They provide the parent leadership essential to developing school strengths, identifying and solving problems, and building the partnership between schools and parents necessary to education. The New York City Board of Education, recognizing the importance of a parent association to a school's success, issues this policy statement to foster strong and effective parent representation in every school, and at every level of the school system. It is hoped that this revision will provide the framework for strengthened working relationships and collaborative efforts by parent associations and school officials for the benefit of the schools and the students.

Program

Planning and Design

In 1988 the Director launched the new parent involvement initiative by visiting each school and providing an orientation to each PIP teacher or staff member. She established a series of steps to be used to organize a parent and family involvement program. The first step was to design a parent/family survey to determine the types of topics that would be of interest, and the times of day when parents would be able to attend meetings or workshops. The survey continues to be conducted on a yearly basis.

During our site visit, we were able to obtain a copy of the most recent survey. It contains 19 questions, and parents are asked to respond by circling "YES, if you feel that the statement pretty much describes what's going on in your school; circle NO if you feel this in not the case, or circle DK if you don't know enough to answer the question." The questions range from "I feel welcome when I visit my child's school" to "I know what teachers expect from my child" to "There is a parent room or parent center at my child's school." The survey is printed in both English and Spanish, and the Program Director told us that "not every parent/family responds, but we are able to get enough responses to know what elements of the program need to be changed, or augmented."

In our interviews with the Director she told us that involving more parents/family members was a crucial first step in designing the program, and she felt it was important to center parent/family involvement on student achievement. In her opinion, "...parent associations can devote time to advocacy and political leadership, but I wanted the focus to be directed toward pupil achievement, and you can't do a lot of things well. So it was my thinking that (parent advocacy) will happen in spite of this office..."

A key component of the program was involving all school staff in the initiative in order to "send the message that parent involvement is critical to the district's success." The Office of Parent Involvement offers workshops for all staff - including school secretaries and security guards - because they believe that it is critical for all of the people in the school to make parents feel welcome. Principals are held accountable for parent involvement, and are rated on their ability to make parent programs work. The Director believes that the inclusive nature of this programmatic approach is necessary for success. This belief is obvious in the following quotation:

> This is not just an effort of this office, but it is an effort of everyone on the district office staff. As they work with parents and they work with teachers, we talk a lot about roles...responsibilities.. and mutual respect....Everyone has to be doing this or it doesn't work.

Initial Implementation

Initiating parent involvement programs and establishing a new type of relationship with parents in the district took a lot of time and effort. First attempts to bring people together in a meeting format did not work well since, as one person we interviewed put it, "nobody wanted to talk to anyone else". To try to understand what to do, the district office visited with each principal, contacted any organized group that existed, and conducted a survey for all the parents in the district. The results of the survey were surprising. Parents/families did not want to know about volunteer activities, the parent association, or anything particular having to do with the school. Instead, district parents wanted the schools to help them to meet their more basic needs like housing and employment. Parents also wanted information and programs to address furthering their own education.

The Parent Involvement Program Office listened and responded. Meeting social service needs, in their view, was part of meeting student achievement needs. The office contacted all of the social service agencies they could find in Manhattan, and sponsored a district fair. They compiled and distributed a directory of services. This established their office as one that was directly responsive to parents' needs.

During the second year of operation the staff decided to expand its scope of work and offer a variety of programs to meet parent and school needs. They researched information on what was working in parent involvement elsewhere in the country and began to develop a menu of services. They specifically chose programs that had been found to be successful in other places, and ones that did not demand too much preparation and effort on the part of the teachers and other school staff. As part of their community building philosophy, they also hired two people, School Neighborhood Workers, for each school "to kind of mother hen the growth and development of the program" at the school level.

Each program that was offered as part of the menu was a little different. Some provided resource people to work with parents at a school. Some gave materials for the staff to distribute. Some established field trips for parents and children to learn about museums or other cultural activities available to them in the city. The type of activity available to the parents depended upon what the sponsoring agency was willing to do.

The Parent Involvement Program office also initiated a workshop program for the parents that was responsive to what parents had indicated as information needs and concerns. Topics such as nutrition, dealing with stress, understanding adolescents, and others that addressed specific parenting skills and issues were offered and well attended. Social events were also sponsored and were well attended. These events helped to engender a feeling of group identity and connectedness to the schools.

The workshop program was set up in a limited but structured way in the first year of its operation. Additional resources were expended to provide staff development for teachers and principals. The idea was to help school people to understand the purposes and rationale of parent involvement and for them to speak with resource people to gain a better understanding of parents' needs and the agencies that are available to serve those needs.

Current Implementation

By the third year of the program, and continuing through the time of our site visit, a large menu of workshops containing twenty or more offerings is available to parents through the Parent Involvement Program office. Staff development continues, emphasizing teacher, principal, and parent/family responsibility for parent/family involvement at the building level. The district office currently operates more as a resource center, and School Neighborhood Workers offer more direct services to parents, both by serving as school-parent liaisons and by arranging and/or delivering workshops onsite. Parents/family members provide the leadership to determine what the parent involvement needs are, and the Parent Involvement Program office continues to respond.

Parent Education. Workshops are offered to help the parents understand the school curriculum, especially reading and math, and to give parents strategies and materials to use at home with their children to support their learning. At some schools, the program concentrates on parenting skills and social issues such as adolescent sexuality, child abuse, and personal safety. Workshops on stress management, English as a Second Language, and computer literacy are offered at many sites. At all of the middle schools, parents are given the opportunity to take courses that allow them to complete their GED. The district also produces a districtwide newsletter, and continues to provide an updated directory of services available to parents through social service agencies, and community fairs.

In the District 3 parent involvement program, trained volunteers offer a series of workshops for parents on topics relevant to the concerns of parents with children of particular ages. For example, parents of middle school children may learn ways to cope with adolescent behaviors, and drug resistance or resiliency skills. Parents also learn strategies for working with their children on problem-solving, self-concept, and personal responsibility in all content areas.

The district offers these workshops and programs on the district and school levels, and facilitates delivery of the sessions. Parent Involvement Program office staff offer some of the training sessions themselves, particularly if they address perceived district level issues. For example, in the 1992 and 1993 school years, the Parent Involvement Program staff provided a series of workshops on conflict resolution for parents, teachers, principals, guidance counselors, and other school staff including security guards and custodians. The office also provides handouts at these meetings that address some of the most serious or ongoing educational concerns in the district, state, or nation.

Parent/Child Learning Activities. Parent/child learning activities are part of the mix offered to parents and teachers in response to particular perceived needs. For example, a math teacher was interested in sharing some of the new curriculum ideas with parents, so the school sponsored a weekly half hour series for parents and children on math. Fifteen parents attended every week. The district also sponsors several programs like Family Math and Parents as Reading Partners that had been used successfully in other sites. These programs are viewed as successful in a limited way in that the parents who were involved continue to implement the strategies offered and to enjoy the program. However, participation is limited to small numbers of parents, and the approach is not systemic in nature, but rather dependent on individual interest.

Teachers are also given the opportunity to use and send home with students a home learning kit that was developed by the PIP Director when she was employed in New York City District 11. These kits are created for three different grade spans: K-2, 3-5, and 6-8. They contain learning tools to help parents reinforce and/or develop children's skills, particularly in reading comprehension, vocabulary, and math. They also have suggestions for parents to help them to encourage their children to see reading and school itself as important and enjoyable.

In District 11, the home learning kits were sent to parents when they were notified that their children were to be retained or "held over" in their grade. The kits were viewed as a way to give parents resources on how to help their children to succeed. Between 6,000 and 8,000 kits per year were sent to District 11 parents. For District 3, these kits have been made available to principals and teachers who choose whether and when to use them. They are disseminated to individual parents occasionally at schools and during meetings sponsored by the Parent Involvement Program office, but fewer than 1,000 are distributed each year. The Director attributes their relative lack of use to three things:

- many of the parents in the district are monolingual Spanish speakers, and only some of the materials in the kit are written in Spanish;
- the needs of the parents are so great that it is important to meet their basic social service needs first before they can be assisted to work with their children's academic needs; and
- the district office has limited resources, most of which have been committed either to specific programs or to schools to make their own choices with regard to parent involvement approaches.

Leadership Training. Parent association leaders are given direct support to help them develop their individual leadership skills, goals and activities. They are taught how to recruit and keep people involved, how to conduct workshops, how to facilitate self-help sessions, where to find information and materials, where to visit model programs, and how to help each other to strengthen the organization. The PTA president speaks eloquently about the kinds of support she received. She wanted to involve more parents and expand the program beyond the 25 or so parents that had always been involved. She turned to the Parent Involvement Program office who offered materials, strategies, and guidance. The approach worked. The PTA President told us:

> When I first became president of the PTA, I had never done anything like this before...I was not going to have to start from scratch to do something, but I really felt at a loss...My philosophy was to bring in more parents and get a wider spectrum and viewpoint that didn't happen to be those of the self-interest of the people who were involved. So [the Director] came to one of our meetings ... and talked to us about what she knew about getting parents to get involved and what strategies and tactics she used. That was how my own leadership was developed...

The Director used this same approach to bring groups of people together to learn about leadership skills through engaging in leadership activities. Parents from partner schools were joined together to discuss school goals, what is important to them with regard to schooling and their children's lives, and what is going on in the schools to address academic needs. The staff modeled a structured process to help parents understand the task, arrive at consensus, and formulate plans. As the parent leaders point out, "It is the modeling of leadership at the same time you are learning leadership".

The district sponsors Effective Parenting Information for Children (EPIC) workshops. EPIC provides a curriculum with a variety of sample lessons which are offered using a workshop format for parents and/or teachers. Affective and cognitive concepts are integrated into the content areas of language arts, social studies, health, and home and career skills. For the middle and high school, three learning areas are stressed: self-concept and self-esteem; rules, rights, and responsibilities; and decision-making and problem-solving.[1]

Challenges

The type of parent involvement at the middle school level is different than that of the elementary school in District 3. Like other districts, District 3 finds that it must change the nature of its parent involvement activities for middle school parents in response to their evolving needs and circumstances. Parents are more likely to be working once their children are in middle school, and children are less likely to want to have their parents come to school as volunteers. The children want to be more independent, and the parents face different challenges related to their children's development stage and their academic progress.

At the middle school level, parents want to know about the political issues facing the school, adolescent development issues, and topics that are geared toward adult education and their own achievement/career growth. While parents still serve on school decision making committees and will come to school to watch their children perform or to hear a guest speaker address them on a topic of interest, they are much less likely to engage in specific adult/child learning activities in the home. In District 3, parents feel that the children should take more responsibility for their own learning once they reach the middle school, and that the character of parent involvement should change. Instead of coming to school twenty or more times a year, they come two or three. Instead of wanting to engage in conversations about how to help their children to succeed, they often want to understand how they themselves can succeed. Sometimes they feel unskilled or unable to help their children in their academic work. Most of the time, it appears as though they think that their job is to support the school and their children through advocacy for schooling and learning, but not through engaging in specific learning activities with their children. One middle grades parent told us: "It makes my kids feel great that I am going back to school, that mommy is doing something. It helps my self-esteem and makes them feel very proud to see that their mother is willing to learn".

---

[1] For a detailed description of the content of the EPIC Program, see the Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville, Kentucky, case study on page 12 of this volume.

Since our site visit during the spring of 1993, the Director of the PIP has retired, although she continues to serve as a consultant for Community School District 3. In follow-up telephone interviews with PIP staff, the loss of the Director was viewed as a major challenge for the program. The Director had served as an advocate for the program, and was well-liked among the program staff and the practitioners in the school. Without her, those we interviewed felt that the program was in danger of "losing direction and focus."

Supports

Although we were not able to obtain a current budget for the PIP office, a preliminary budget for the New York City Board of Education (BOE) revealed that the districtwide budget "savings target" for FY1995 totaled $357 million. While the Parent Involvement Program Office is not mentioned directly in the budget, the Director felt that "with such massive cuts in systemwide funding, it is likely that our program may suffer - especially in terms of the number of people that we will have to serve the schools."

Like parent and family involvement programs at other levels, the middle school parent involvement program relies on individualized design and close personal relationships. Each school has two individuals to plan and implement activities. District personnel feel that these individuals are a key support in meeting parents' needs, and view their work as both significant and contributory to children's achievement.

Staff felt one reason why the overall parent involvement program is successful is the relationship that was built between individual parents and the school. PIP staff felt that the most important aspect of their job was to build a community, that is, a strong link between home, neighborhood, and school forged on the basis of a personal relationship. The School Neighborhood Workers feel strongly that the essence of their job is to create a family-type atmosphere where parents are comfortable and feel that their needs are being addressed. In this way, staff respond directly to the needs expressed by parents. One of the School Neighborhood Workers told us:

> This is how I look at my job. I view it as if for that one hour, this is my home. I am going to invite you ... talk to you...or help you through something...and the schools I service, I really

> feel like it's a family...sometimes they can bring problems or grievances or whatever, but we can deal with it and it's a family type atmosphere.

The linkages that are created with parents are both "horizontal", that is, between home, neighborhood, school, social service agencies, health agencies, and cultural communities, and "vertical", across time and schools. Programs are built upon one another over time, and schools are connected together so that transitions from elementary to middle and middle to secondary schools are taken into account and made smoother through the use of information, visitations, and again the personal touch. This type of continuity appears to have led to more stability and institutionalization of the programs and processes put into place.

In reflecting back on her experiences in implementing parent involvement programs in the district, the Director feels that the district office has played a strong role in supporting school efforts toward increased parent, family and community involvement. She told us:

> The first step is establishing trust...this is accomplished by getting involved with anything and everything - arts and crafts, high interest workshops - anything. Once parent involvement staff become a presence in the school, they must understand needs and the best way to provide services and education for the parents. Only then, once these services have benefitted parents, do they [the parents] really give back in the form of helping their own children and volunteering in the school.

Outcomes

District 3 staff feel that both the quantity and the quality of parent involvement has improved in the district since 1988. Far more activities are being offered and more parents are attending events and workshops. Parents report engaging in learning activities with their children more often, and earning GEDs and/or learning more parenting skills themselves. They are more connected with their community and avail themselves of more of the social services and cultural resources available to them. They feel they have avenues for expression within the district, both on policies and on activities designed to meet parent needs.

Parents report feeling more comfortable being in the school itself. Workshops are viewed as "parent-friendly". Parents feel connected, and a welcome part of the greater school community. Parents of elementary school students are particularly likely to come to the school and to help their children at home with academic activities, but PIP staff noted that they are "seeing more and more middle grade parents eager to help their children with school-related projects."

Student achievement has also increased in Community School District 3. The district moved from being among the worst in the district to being about in the middle with regard to reading and math scores on standardized tests. "While we can't make a direct correlation with parent involvement," the Director told us, "we really feel that increased student achievement is related to our efforts in combination with the emphasis on teaching and learning, the new leadership in the district, and staff support."

The duality of centralized and decentralized structures with an emphasis on the personal, individualized needs illustrates another outcome of the PIP in District 3: relationships with parents are not just established with individual teachers or school staff, but with the district as a whole. When the Director offers guidance to parent leaders or when liaisons encourage parents to attend GED classes or use the home learning kits, they are establishing a connection with the district as a system, almost in the sense of a service organization. The schools as a linked system become a set of resources for parents to further the achievement of the whole family, not just the children. This type of system enhances the ability of teachers to teach and children to learn since the whole system becomes a learning and service organization that supports the community as a whole.

Lessons

1. *Parent/family and community partnerships are viewed as a "system."*
   Adult/Child Learning Activities were considered as a first step to be used to engage parents' interest in becoming involved with the school; they are insufficient in and of themselves to sustain long term involvement and meet families' needs.
2. *This system must attempt to integrate schools, families, and the community both "vertically" and "horizontally."*
   Vertical connections exist between the home, school and community; the Parent Involvement Program often acts as a linkage to other service providers. Horizontal integration occurs over the "life cycle" of schooling; parents are able to see important instructional goals for their children as they move from grade to grade.

3. *The partnership system has relatively clear developmental aspects.*

   The nature of school/family partnerships changes as both children and families mature. District 3 responded to these developmental changes by providing a variety of activities to meet the evolving needs of the families it serves.

4. *Partnerships are established with the district as a whole.*

   Parents/families are linked to the district through their participation in the program; schools serve as a set of resources for parents to further their children's achievement, their own individual achievement, or the achievement of the whole family.

Rochester City School District
Rochester, New York

Case Study

Enthusiasm for an alternative learning approach, and parents and children actively working together are the hallmarks of the Parent/Child Basic Learning Program in Rochester. The Parent/Child Basic Learning Program began with the adoption of Family Math - a nationally recognized program that links students and family members in joint learning activities. Building on success, Family Reading and Family Science were added to the program. Megaskills and a Parent Academy were added to provide family training and support. Although the Parent/Child Basic Learning Program primarily serves elementary and early middle grade students and parents, there may be benefits for older middle grade students and families as well.

Context

We were interested in how adult/child learning experiences fit into the larger community environment and the district's parent/family involvement initiatives. We found that the Parent/Child Basic Learning Program is one part of a multifaceted parent/family involvement effort in the school district.

Rochester/Rochester City School District. The City of Rochester is currently experiencing a higher poverty rate than it has in 30 years. There is a continuous flight of higher income families to the suburbs. Manufacturing, the traditional base for the economy, has declined; state government services, service industries, transportation, and utilities have grown. Many of the newly created jobs pay minimum wage. Rochester was rated the thirteenth worst city in the nation for childhood poverty in 1989 by the Children's Defense Fund.

Changes within the community are reflected in the schools and student population also. Three-fourths of the students in the district are people of color. This tremendous increase in diversity from the student population 20 years ago mirrors a national trend for inner-city schools. The majority of students in the district are considered economically disadvantaged. Sixty-eight percent of them qualify for a free or reduced price-lunch. Over the past four years student enrollment has increased by nine percent and is expected to continue to grow.

Within this context, Rochester City Schools face the challenge of meeting the educational needs of a growing, diverse, and highly mobile school population. Families have limited resources, lack transportation, and due to safety concerns in some areas, are unlikely to attend activities at night.

The district's parent involvement policy was established in 1990. Since that time, there has been an increase in the number of active parent/family organizations in the schools. This policy details the role of parents and family members as:

- leaders in their schools;
- volunteers;
- leaders at the district level;
- partners in policy-making; and
- teachers of their children.

In describing parents as teachers of their children, the Board policy states that they...

> support the expansion of parent education programs at the local school, in order to empower parents with the knowledge and skills with which to support their children's development in the home. (Rochester City School District 90-91:747(6) Parent Involvement Policy)

Rochester City School District has a District Parent Council with representatives from each school's parent organization. The Council meets monthly to identify and address districtwide parent and family concerns. The council emphasizes the formation and strengthening of parent groups within the schools. Council members are encouraged to join one of six subcommittees that are open to any interested parent. These include:

- Human Resources;
- Student Support;
- Budget;
- Curriculum;
- Legislative; and
- Policy.

Chapter 1, a federally funded program for educationally disadvantaged children, requires parent involvement. All Chapter 1 programs within schools have parent involvement activities. For example, the Chapter 1 program at School #36 sponsored a summer school library reading program with a parent component. The Chapter 1 program has its own district Parent Center in a local Masonic Temple that provides educational computer/technology programs, parent education programs, parent-child programs and parent/community-based partnership events. These services are available only to families who qualify for Chapter 1. Some of the district's Chapter 1 funds are used to support the Department of Parent and Community Involvement.

The Family Learning Center teaches academic, vocational, and parenting skills to teen mothers, and "survival English" for new immigrants. Funded through the Jobs Act, the center opened in 1990 and is the largest family learning center in the country, serving over 320 infants, young children, and their families. The Toyota Families for Literacy Program operates in several schools in Rochester. The program provides all day preschool for children and Adult Basic Education/General Education Development studies for adults.

Through these policies and programs, Rochester City Schools attempt to link parents and family members with the school district. The Parent/Child Basic Learning Program directly links parents and family members with students through joint learning activities at home.

Program

Planning and design

The director of the Department of Parent and Community Involvement initially conducted a survey of parents and family members to determine what families needed and what interested parents about their children's schooling. The survey indicated that parents were most interested in supporting their children in school. At the same time, the district gathered information from the community that indicated that some high school graduates were not prepared for the workplace; some could not fill out job applications. Staff members also were impressed by a background study done for the district by a University of Brockport professor, Dr. Young. The findings of the study indicated that disadvantaged students whose parents were very involved in their education excelled in math and science.

In response to these various sources of data, district administrators made the decision to adopt a program that involved families. They felt that a program that directly linked parents to students' learning would ensure academic success and a better-educated workforce in the future. According to the program administrator:

> A lot of children have shied away from the math and science areas and even careers that needed a firm foundation of math and science because it was so intimidating. We thought of looking at how some of our children have been locked out of some of the better paying careers because of the lack of math and science. Perhaps there was a way we could de-mystify some

> of that, making them more comfortable and allowing them to move into the math and science areas. We decided to look into Family Math because math was one of the areas of great need for our children."

The department director took an unconventional approach to secure funds to support the implementation of the Parent/Child Basic Learning Program. Rather than seeking funds through programs which educate children, he sought out adult education funds. A special fund provided by the state of New York, Employment Preparation Education (EPE), reimburses districts for providing adult learning situations. The director told us:

> The funding source for the program is EPE... is a state-funded source that was set up really to train managers in business - to prepare a boss for the work place. So what we did, in a very kind of creative way, is use it to still teach adults, but to teach children, too. Our primary focus is the child; our secondary focus is the adult. The state's primary purpose was the adult and they hadn't thought about the child. But the way the legislation is written allowed us to do that. In order to pay for the program, there has to be a certain level of attendance by adults, and the state reimburses us through the district, based upon the verified attendance of adults. We looked at it and thought this would fit well into what we were doing because we wanted to make sure that adults were involved in a very constructive way in a learning process with their child.

Teachers and paraprofessionals at seven targeted schools were invited to attend an initial training for Family Math provided by the National Urban Coalition in conjunction with materials developed by Lawrence Hall of Science. The training emphasized hands-on activities rather than lecture; the use of everyday items like peas, straws, and buttons which enable children to grasp concepts more easily; and the importance of family members entering the classroom and being involved with their children. Teacher participants described this training as "multicultural" and "intense". One administrator described the training sessions as "very different from anything" he had seen and attributed the program's success largely to the training provided by the program developers. Because this training was seen as valuable for staff, new Family Math teachers in the program are required to complete the training.

> I was very impressed with the training and I believe to this day that particular workshop training was perhaps at least equal in importance to anything else that was done in making the program successful because it left teachers with not only a sense of purpose but also a motivation and a sense of confidence in the knowledge necessary to do this.

Implementation

During the first year of the program, seven schools were targeted for participation in the program and offered Family Math courses twice a week throughout most of the school year.

By the second year eleven schools were involved. The Parent/Child Basic Learning Program was so successful in helping parents members work with their children on mathematics concepts that parents requested help with reading. The district adopted the Family Reading program during the third year. Megaskills workshops are offered to train and support parents as they work with their children. Megaskills training was funded the EPE monies and in part through district funds. Local teachers trained in Megaskills techniques provide these sessions, along with Family Math and Family Reading, as parents request them.

Principals are important players in the program. Their support gives the Parent/Child Basic Learning Program entry into the schools. Principals are often involved in recruiting staff for the program. They report that staff enthusiasm for the program is essential in recruiting and maintaining parent participation. Some schools have separate Family Math and Family Reading programs. Other schools integrate these programs by providing math and reading activities in the same course.

Teachers and paraprofessionals work as a team in each school offering the courses. Paraprofessionals, often more familiar with parents and family members in the community, are responsible for recruiting families. Each summer, information on the courses is mailed by the district office to all families in the school. Parents and students are also referred to the program by teachers and principals. Program referrals are based on scores on districtwide assessment tests. Paraprofessionals contact these families by phone or through home visits to tell them about the program. Paraprofessionals also attend school open houses and conferences to inform families of the program. Teachers develop the learning activities for the sessions. The programs take place either in the teachers' classrooms or in the cafeteria of the school. Program staff indicate that when teachers teach the courses at their own school, the program is more successful:

> This was the first time in the district that they had parents come out on a regular basis in the district and actually sit with their children two nights a week...As a matter of fact if you go to the classroom you think they are just playing and having fun but you realize they are learning complicated math (concepts).

During our site visits to Rochester, we were able to observe sessions of Family Math and Family Reading. In Family Reading sessions, parents and children were involved in word games, children worked on spelling, and the school library was open so books could be checked out. During one session children selected a reading book and then read it to their parent or the adult with whom they came. Books were available in Spanish and English. The Family Math session we observed began with the children completing their homework assignments for the day. When the homework was completed, children and adults moved from table to table where materials were laid out in packets. Materials included math games and puzzles, and math manipulatives. Refreshments were provided during all the sessions.

Program staff and teachers clearly differentiate between the activities within the Parent/Child Basic Learning Program and those that are a part of the regular classroom day. Program staff believe family learning activities need to be different, "fun," and engaging for the whole family. However, Parent/Child Basic Learning Program activities also make important connections with classroom learning as noted by a program administrator:

> It helps the parent to understand what is going on in the classroom. This is critically important and gives the parents a sensitivity to classroom kinds of activities. They can appreciate much more the need to assist a child when the child comes home because the parent actually experiences this first hand.

In some cases, teaching staff connect the parent-child learning activities to their classroom instruction by using the same word lists or other content used in their regular classroom. A large portion of the monthly staff meeting time is devoted to sharing ideas for new activities. Learning activities are developed based on student needs, upcoming testing, teacher input, and parent requests for homework. The program is designed to promote the teachers' use of creativity.

Two new components have been added to the program during the past year: Family Science and a Parent Academy. Family Science training was provided by the National Urban Coalition in conjunction with materials developed by the North West EQUALS Project at Portland State University. Learning activities for the Family Science course come from the training and materials, as well as from the teaching staff. The Parent Academy is designed to help parents learn the basic academic content which their child is expected to know for each grade, to help parents find out if their child is learning this content, to give assistance in asking the right questions at school conferences, and to give assistance in providing a quality educational experience for their children within the district.

The Parent Academy design differs from the other courses because only parents or interested adults attend the sessions. The program administrator, who teaches the course, reports that the initial response to the Parent Academy has been overwhelmingly positive.

Parents indicate that they are gaining more relevant information than they have gained from other similar courses and community based agencies are requesting the Parent Academy for their clients.

Challenges

The Parent/Child Basic Learning Program is, like many other family involvement initiatives, faced with challenges. These include funding and the district budget process, open enrollment, and student mobility.

Administrators are burdened by problems with funding. Using the state Employment Preparation Education funds that provide reimbursement based on the number of adults attending each session creates some difficulty. The reimbursement formula makes it necessary to have at least eight adults attend each session in order to cover staff salaries. When adult attendance at a school is consistently lower than this, programs have to be discontinued. Participating families are invited to transfer to a different school, but often parents want to be involved in programs at their child's school.

The politics of the budget process within the Rochester City Schools also affects the ability of the district to coordinate its efforts on behalf of families. Family initiatives are loosely coordinated at the district level; parents who wish to participate in an additional family learning program, or to attend Adult Education classes, must choose between the Parent/Child Basic Learning Program or other alternatives due to scheduling conflicts and the absence of coordination between the programs.

The district's open enrollment policy leads to some difficulties. The Rochester City School District transports 16,000 of its 35,000 public school students each year. Many students, primarily those in the secondary level, do not attend their neighborhood schools but instead go to magnet schools. This poses a challenge for adult-child learning activities at the secondary level because most of the adult-child learning activities in Rochester schools are offered for parents and children at neighborhood schools.

The high mobility rate that is especially prominent in some schools in the district is a barrier to consistent participation. When program participants move, they tend not to return to previous neighborhood schools for special programs.

One administrator discussed some of the developmental changes in students which create challenges for implementing this program in the middle schools. He states:

> One of the problems we face...is what happens at the middle school levels when students begin to say, 'I don't need you to come to school.' As a matter of fact, some of them get embarrassed when their parents come to the school. Because now they are into this peer pressure issue. Parents get a little bit confused because on the one hand they want to support their child, and on the other hand they want them to be independent and it is time for little Sue or Joe to do this on her or his own. ...We need...to make sure that parents understand the importance of their continuing involvement, and it might take different forms. But, that involvement and that knowledge of what's going on with that child is critical to the child's success. Because even though they have this need, and feel it's important to give the child a little more rope to go on his own, it's a very critical point for the child. The child also needs guidance, support and input from the parent.

Principals, parents, teachers, and administrative staff in the parent office noted a number of other difficulties in implementing the program. These include:

- harsh winter weather;
- lack of adequate transportation; and
- language barriers for families who do not speak English.

To address some of these challenges, program staff indicated they frequently contacted the parents/family members when a students has not been in class. They sometimes find problems arise from a lack of basic family needs such as food or adequate clothing for winter. Program staff frequently make referrals to local service providers to help families with their basic needs.

Supports

We found that program leadership and the use of resources are key contributions to the success of the Parent/Child Basic Learning Program. As a new administrator, the program director provides the leadership to access a previously untapped resource for parent-child learning activities - Employment Preparation Education funds. The Department of Parent and Community Involvement uses less than one percent of the city's share ($10.9 million) of this money, yet it has become a lifeline for the program and a stabilizing financial resource during a period of budget crisis.

Administrative support and ongoing development is also a key to the success of the program. The Parent and Community Involvement Department actively provides administrative services for adult-child learning programs through the administration of funds, training of teaching and paraprofessional staff, assistance with family recruiting, and writing of proposals for funding to expand programs (i.e., Family Science and the Parent Academy).

Internal school supports have been created that enable the adult/child learning programs to connect to their immediate community by using their school's conventional resources. For example, School No. 36 emphasized parent use of the library in both its summer program for Chapter 1 students and in the subsequent Family Reading sessions throughout the year. School No. 9 emphasizes creative activities (like the use of bilingual books) to bring together activities for African American and Puerto Rican families to learn with their children. This effort is supported by the school's dual language program. In addition the social supports that develop internally among the families attending the program are cited as a contributing factor to the stability of the program at each school.

Family attitudes play a strong role in the success of the program. Several parents stated that they are involved in the program because they need their child to know that they care about his/ her education. This was further evidenced by the fact that some parents, who can not regularly attend, send other family members to the program to be with the child. One parent stated, "Teachers need our support to move forward."

Children become good recruiters of their parents. Many parents reported attending the program due to repeated prompting from their children.

Support for the program also comes from the community. The Department of Parent and Community Involvement gets funding from Kodak, one of the community's major industries, to "keep the program materials fresh and in good volume."

The 1993-94 budget for the Department of Parent and Community Involvement is $150,000. Of this total, 15 percent comes from Chapter 1; 55 percent is state and local funds; and 30 percent comes from private funds. Over the past three years, overall funding has decreased by 60 percent due to cutbacks in district funds. The budget is allocated as follows:

- 85 percent is spent on salaries and benefits for Parent Involvement Department staff, program teachers, and paraprofessionals;
- 10 percent is spent on materials and supplies; and
- 5 percent is spent on unspecified program costs.

Employment Preparation Education funds 80 percent of the Parent/Child Basic Learning Program costs. The Parent and Community Involvement Department makes up the difference from their local district funds. In addition, in 1993-1994, programs received use of meeting space, copiers, and mailing resources as in- kind support.

Outcomes

According to the project administrator, funds have not been available to do a "real evaluation" of the program. Program staff routinely collect information - for continued funding - on the number of children and adults who participate in these programs.

A partial evaluation of the program was conducted during 1992-93. Math grades for a small random sample of students (n=9) who completed Family Math and went on to middle school were reviewed. All the middle grade students improved their grades in math, as judged by teacher letter grades. The California Achievement Test (CAT) pre- and post- test scores of another random sample of nine children who participated in the Family Math component were also reviewed. The average test score for these students increased 33%.

Parents remark that their children's attitudes have improved toward education. Children are now eager to attend the classes and engage in learning activities in the home with the parent's involvement.

We asked program administrators, school principals, teachers and paraprofessionals who offer the activities, and participating parents and children what impact they felt the program was having on participants. Teachers and other program personnel noted gains in grades for students completing the Family Math program. They indicate that " great strides" were made in reading skills as a result of participation in Family Reading.

Respondents comments were generally consistent and did not vary by the program emphasis - Family Reading, Family Math, or Megaskills. The outcomes that were articulated for children include:

- increased confidence and willingness to try difficult subject matter;
- easier grasp of difficult concepts;
- changes in attitude (particularly attitudes toward learning) and behaviors (particularly conduct in the regular classroom and about doing homework);
- improvement in grades;

- increase in self-esteem;
- gains in math and reading skills;
- fun;
- increased amount of time children read for enjoyment; and
- decreased television viewing at home in favor of doing Family Math or Reading activities.

The outcomes that were articulated for parents include:

- new ways to help their child at home;
- improved parent/child relationships;
- increased understanding of their child's class work;
- increased motivation to return to school, earn a GED, and enter the work force;
- increased participation in other parent roles in relation to the school (volunteering and participating in parent groups);
- increased comfort with coming to school; and
- improved conferencing skills (knowing what questions to ask about the curriculum; being able to converse with teachers and administrators about how they feel their child ought to be taught).

Outcomes expressed for teachers and the school as a whole include:

- increased overall level of parent involvement in the school building;
- increased number of teachers suggesting to parents that they might want to participate in Family Math or Reading with their children; and
- increased use of the concepts from Family Math, Family Reading, and Megaskills by regular classroom teachers.

Middle Schools. Currently, the Parent/Child Basic Learning Program is being implemented in Rochester elementary schools which include early middle grades (4-6). Participants tend to be families of younger children. However one teacher noted, regarding her class participants, "I typically get older children, fourth, fifth and sixth. It's like a club." When asked about incorporating the program in the middle schools an administrator states:

> What we are hoping to do by dealing with the elementary schools ... is to increase the level of effective parent involvement in the early stages and hope that we will be able to follow that through and hope that parents will take it upon themselves to continue that kind of involvement

right on through the middle school and high school. It seems that it drops off gradually and by the time the child reaches high school the parents aren't even there in most cases.

Lessons

We are able to draw several lessons from the experience of the staff and families involved in Rochester's Parent/Child Basic Learning Program. These lessons provide insight into the development and implementation of other parent/family involvement programs generally, and adult/child learning programs in particular:

1. *Look to non-traditional sources for funding.*

   The use of the state adult education funds have provided the bulk of the funding for the Parent/Child Basic Learning Program.

2. *Expand/enhance a program that has proven to be successful.*

   The developers of the Parent/Child Basic Learning Program continued to use the same successful structure of the Family Math program to develop Family Reading and Family Science. Megaskills and a Parent Academy were added to the program to support the family involvement initiative.

3. *Staff enthusiasm toward the program significantly contributes to success.*

   We consistently observed an excitement for the activity based learning used in the Parent/Child Learning Program. This attitude was reflected in all the workings of the program and most importantly in the interactions with families.

4. *Programs that work with younger children will not work in the same way with older children due to developmental changes in the children and the family's response to these changes.*

   Although the Parent/Child Basic Learning Program had not been implemented in the upper middle grades, administrators expressed a belief that the program would need to be designed and implemented with different strategies and activities to be successful with older children and their families. For example, staff believed the Parent Academy would be quite successful with parents of middle grade students because it supports the parent in serving as a advocate for children within the educational system. Parental advocacy can be a role shift for parents as children mature and move away from regular, intimate learning experiences with parents.

5. *Creating opportunities for parents and children to work together has a strong impact on children's success in school.*
   Evaluation information from the Parent/Child Basic Learning Program indicated that a small sample of students who participated in the program improved their letter grades, as judged by classroom teachers, and norm-referenced test scores.